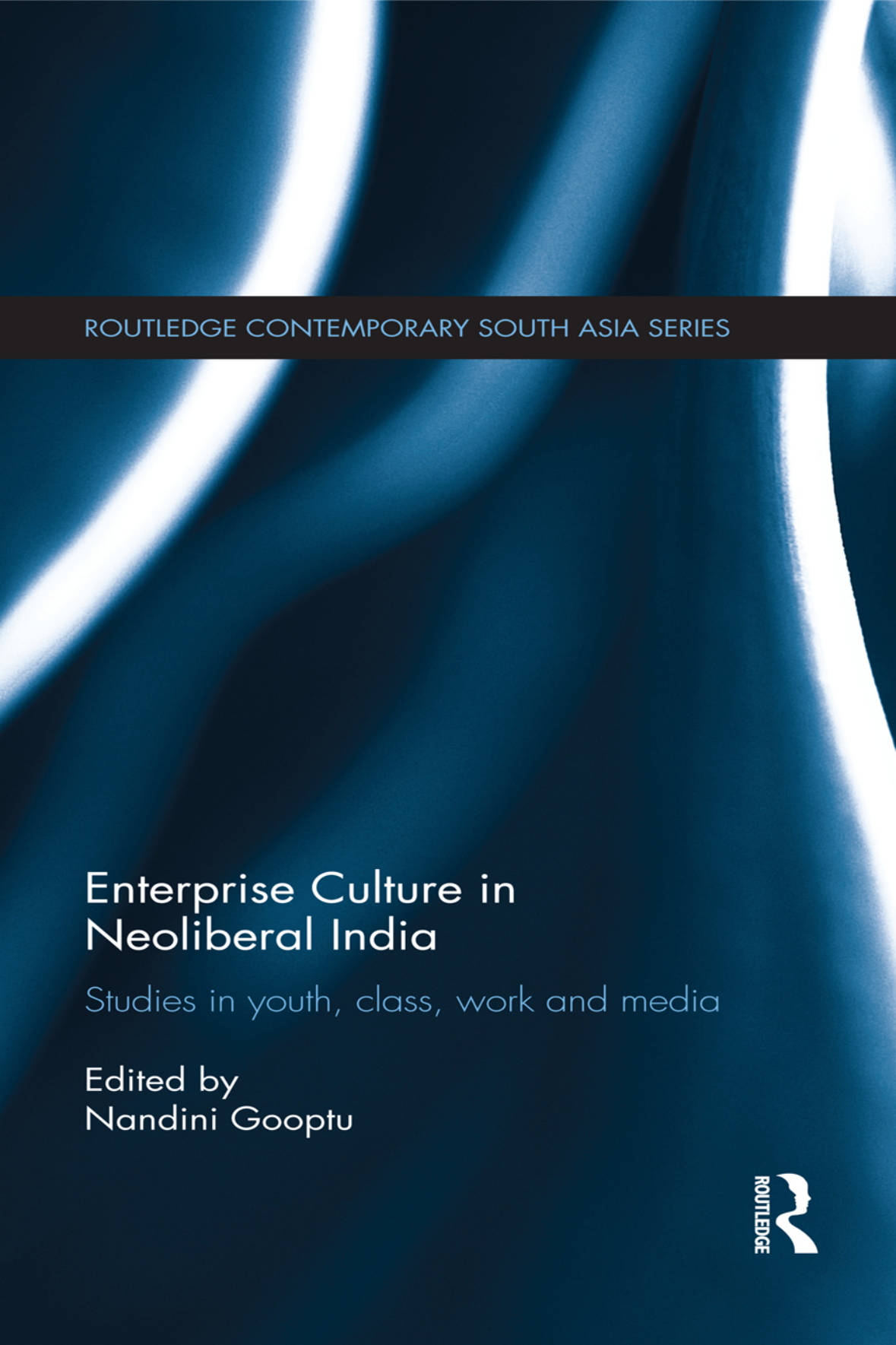
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Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India
Studies in youth, class, work and media
Edited by
Nandini Gooptu
ROUTLEDGE

Enterprise Culture in Neoliberal India

The promotion of an enterprise culture and entrepreneurship in India in recent decades has had far-reaching implications beyond the economy, and transformed social and cultural attitudes and conduct. This book brings together pioneering research on the nature of India's enterprise culture, covering a range of different themes: workplace, education, religion, trade, films, media, youth identity, gender relations, class formation and urban politics.

Based on extensive empirical and ethnographic research by the contributors, the book shows the myriad manifestations of enterprise culture and the making of the aspiring, enterprising-self in public culture, social practice, and personal lives, ranging from attempts to construct hegemonic ideas in public discourse, to appropriation by individuals and groups with unintended consequences, to forms of contested and contradictory expression. It discusses what is 'new' about enterprise culture and how it relates to pre-existing ideas, and goes on to look at the processes and mechanisms through which enterprise culture is becoming entrenched, as well as how it affects different classes and communities. The book highlights the social and political implications of enterprise culture and how it recasts family and interpersonal relationships as well as personal and collective identity.

Illuminating one of the most important aspects of India's current economic and social transformation, this book is of interest to students and scholars of Asian Business, Sociology, Anthropology, Development Studies and Media and Cultural Studies.

Nandini Gooptu is a Fellow of St Antony's College, University of Oxford, UK, and teaches History, Politics and Development Studies. Her publications include *The Politics of the Urban Poor in Early-Twentieth Century India* (2001) and *India and the British Empire* (co-edited, 2012).

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Introduction

Nandini Gooptu

Dreams of an aspirational, enterprising India

> There are two Indias in this country. One India is straining at the leash, eager to spring forth. The other India *is* the leash. One India lives in the optimism of our hearts. The other India lurks in the scepticism of our minds. One India wants. The other India hopes. One India leads. The other India follows. While the world is not looking, a pulsating, dynamic India is emerging. An India whose faith in success is far greater than its fear of failure. Now, in our sixtieth year as a free nation, [we are at] the edge of time's great precipice. And one India, a tiny little voice at the back of the head, is looking down at the bottom of the ravine, and hesitating. The other India is looking up at the sky and saying: It's time to fly.[1]

This is the 'anthem' of 'India Poised: Our Time is Now', a nation-wide, highly publicized campaign run by the national daily newspaper *Times of India* in 2007, on the sixtieth anniversary of India's independence. The campaign celebrated what is described as the newly emergent 'pulsating, dynamic' India, suffused with 'optimism' and the aspiration 'to fly'. This India, 'straining at the leash' to embark on a journey of 'success', is juxtaposed against the caution, 'fear', and 'scepticism' that stifle the old India. The latter, it appears, was spawned by an autarchic post-colonial developmental state, the legacy of which is still believed to persist in corrupt and failed governance. The ills of that old state were then addressed in the subsequent *Times of India* campaign, entitled 'Lead India', in the same year. The stated aim of this campaign, in its 'manifesto', was to inspire enterprising Indian youth to direct their talents to the task of public governance, just as they apply their expertise and abilities in the private corporate world to successfully establish India as a major economic power. The stirring 'anthem' of 'Lead India' rallied Indians to action – 'to do', to dominate the world, as Mahatma Gandhi had once issued the anti-colonial nationalist clarion call to 'Do or Die' to liberate the country from a foreign yoke:

> Two simple alphabets – 'D', 'O'; place them side by side however, and they form a word powerful enough to turn a mass of people into a nation. The

> last time we decided to 'do or die', it changed the map of the world. Today we've reached a stage where the eyes of the world are on us again. So what are we going to *do*? Are we going to simply shrug our shoulders, blame our infrastructure, our bureaucracy and our political system? Or are we going to roll up our sleeves, get up and actually *do* something about it? Today we are in our sixtieth year of Independence and we're still happy being called an 'emerging' economy, a 'potential' super power or a 'sleeping' tiger. This must change. And it's only possible if some of us dare to *be* the change. So let's stop basking in our glorious past or daydreaming about our great future. Let's start by dominating today. And domination starts with 'DO'.[2]

Kamal Nath, a highly influential and prominent minister in central government from 2004 onwards and author of a book on entrepreneurship, affirms that the new economic policies launched in 1991 gave birth to a new generation of Indian doers, who act with a sense of urgency to transform their dreams into reality:

> The reforms of the summer of 1991 … triggered a shift in mindset. Social and entrepreneurial energies that had been bottled up were suddenly released, with a force and magnificence that astounded even Indians. One generation of Indians was able to dream dreams that would have been unimaginable to these people's parents.… Life in old India had been … an arduous struggle for a rudimentary necessity. Liberation from this low expectation regimen was cathartic.… A distributional society had given way to an aspirational society.… The horizon of expectations was expanding at all levels. The prevailing conviction was no longer that 'life should be better for my children'. Instead, it was that 'life should get better for me', and in the next few years, if not right now.
>
> (Nath 2008: 59, 60, 75)

Kishore Biyani, CEO and co-founder of the phenomenally successful retail chains of Pantaloons and Big Bazaar, seeks to inspire everyone to dare to dream with courage and passion, by writing an autobiographical account of his own family's unlikely and meteoric success story, in a book entitled *It Happened in India*:

> I now understand the relevance of communicating the story to the potential India of tomorrow. I realise that India needs role models who will make it believe that it can happen right here, in this country.… We need the story of ordinary people who have made extraordinary things happen during *our* times. This book is indeed special! It is special not only because it is the story of my father, but also because it dares me and my generation to dream. It gives me the courage to aspire, and believe that we can create and change things. This simple story of a *dukandaar* [shopkeeper], who learnt while doing, makes me believe that with conviction and self-belief no dream is distant. And to conquer one's dream one only needs passion.
>
> (Biyani 2007: xi)

Nandan Nilekani (2008: 78), co-founder and former CEO of the immensely successful IT firm Infosys and currently the Chairman of the Unique Identity Authority of India, with a cabinet-ranking position in government, asserts that 'our movies have as usual reflected the Indian transformation', because today's films 'are highly aspirational', and they paint 'very different profiles of ordinary people' from the past, who are 'passionate about success', and who have 'a growing belief that ordinary Indians can bring about enormous change'. Dhirubhai Ambani, founder of the multi-billion-dollar Reliance business empire, and the most spectacular example of a rags-to-riches story in recent India, is portrayed in a blockbuster Bollywood film as a determined and courageous individual who turned his dream into reality. The final scene of the film *Guru* (2007), directed by the award-winning film maker Mani Ratnam, shows the eponymous hero, based on Ambani, standing in a large sports stadium, as the camera gradually closes up on him and he starts speaking reflectively: ' "Don't dream. Dreams never come true". My father would say. But I dreamt. We all dreamt. Dreamt of becoming the biggest company in India.' The camera now pans out and reveals a stadium heaving with people, representing the three million shareholders of his company. Guru asks them: 'Has our dream come true.' 'YES' comes the deafening reply. 'And do we stop now?' 'NO.' 'Or do we dream more?' 'YES.' 'Shall we become the world's biggest company?' 'YES.' 'Shall we tell the world we are coming?' 'YES.' Guru now gradually turns and faces the camera and smiles triumphantly, as the film ends.

With 1991 and the launch of economic reforms as a perceived watershed, the present historical conjuncture in India is celebrated in these narratives for marking an epochal shift, the chief significance of which lies in the creation of new Indians, whose dreams, passions, and desires fuel and propel all else, and whose powerful, newly liberated, capacity to aspire is in itself an asset. These representative voices from the state, public media, and the private sector, in unison, define the fundamental spirit of the 'new' age in a language of dreams and aspirations. They declare a determined affirmation of faith in the possibility of change and success 'right now' and in 'our times'. In turn, the realization of these desires and dreams rests on mobilizing the power and energy of active subject agents: the do-ers, who are endowed with what might be called aspirational capital and are imbued with 'passion', 'self-belief', and the 'conviction' that 'no dream is distant'. Reminiscent of Nigel Thrift's (2001) description of the neoliberal 'new' economy of the UK in the 1980s being constructed through the notion of romance and passion for business, the 'new' India is similarly an artefact of the imagination, cast as the product of the passionate and aspirational exertions of active people. These do-ers are no longer held back by 'scepticism', they do not 'blame' the political system or infrastructure; instead they take the responsibility themselves, roll up their sleeves, and plunge into action.

This dominant imagination, indeed public exhortation, to bring forth an aspirational society of active enterprising people is the point of analytical departure for this book. Here, India's enterprise culture, and the related concept of the enterprising self, is the lens through which the nature and extent of change in

contemporary India are probed. It needs to be clarified at the outset that the exploration of enterprise culture in this book is not concerned with economic enterprise or business activity. Instead, drawing upon both widely circulating ideas and practices in India and the wider analytical literature on the subject, enterprise culture here is conceived as one in which individuals are optimistic and passionate do-ers in all fields of life. As active enterprising agents, they acquire the qualities of 'initiative, energy, independence, boldness, self-reliance, a willingness to take risks and to accept responsibility for one's actions and so on' (Keat 1991: 3). The enterprising subject does not necessarily engage in business or economic enterprise, but applies enterprising qualities and conduct to all walks of life, be it the public sphere, the workplace, or education, leisure, and the family (Burchell 1993: 275; Rose 1992). The active enterprising citizen does not make claims on the state and is a self-regulated, self-governed, and self-disciplined individual, prepared to take responsibility for his or her own well-being and for managing risks and vulnerabilities arising from socio-economic or political sources (ibid.; O'Malley 1996). The dynamism of enterprise culture then is the opposite of a culture of dependence or passivity. Enterprise culture, in these senses, has been identified in the analytical literature as a key feature of neoliberalism, with the notion of 'the individual as enterprise' or the individual as 'the entrepreneur of himself or herself' at its heart:

> The idea of one's life as the enterprise of oneself implies that there is a sense in which one remains always employed in (at least) that enterprise, and that it is a part of the continuous business of living to make adequate provision for the preservation, reproduction and reconstruction of one's own human capital. This is the care of the self … [relying] heavily on the contributions of the 'new psychological culture', that cornucopia of the techniques of the self which symbiotize aptitude with self-awareness and performance with self-realization (not to mention self-presentation).
>
> (Gordon 1991: 44)

This book delves into enterprise culture and the construction of the individual enterprising subject as a means to explore the nature of India's contemporary transformation in the wake of the introduction of neoliberalizing policies and measures. The book seeks to understand the underlying mindsets and attitudes that are implicated in India's current neoliberalizing transition.

Neoliberalization as a process

Neoliberalism is usually taken to imply an ideological emphasis on a market ethic, competition, and commodification, with an underlying model of individual human behaviour based on profit or utility maximizing rational choice, in response to incentives created by the market. While these generic features appear in discussions on neoliberalism, it is now a truism, however, that analytically identifying the politics and economics of neoliberalism in any specific context is

an elusive task (Larner 2003; Peck 2004, 2010). 'Actually existing neoliberalism' (Brenner and Theodore 2002a) bears little resemblance to any theoretical formulation or an ideal-typical model. Far from unleashing a uniform set of policies or institutional arrangements or ideological discourses in fulfilment of putative theoretical expectations, neoliberalism has unfolded around the world in a bewildering variety of ways and often as an 'exception' amidst forces of continuity, as Ong (2006) has famously put it. In light of these variations, Jamie Peck (2010: xii–xiii, 24) conceptualizes neoliberalization as 'an open-ended and contradictory process of politically assisted market rule', and 'an adaptive, mutating, and contradictory mode of governance' in 'a malmarketized world'.

Even in the heartland of neoliberal policies in the West, early drastic measures of promotion of the market and attenuation of the state, especially in the domain of welfare and social policy, were short-lived. While market-based principles of profit, performance, and efficiency have been adopted for the internal regulation and functioning of the state (Lemke 2001: 200; Leys 2001), the early tendencies of state withdrawal were scarcely sustained. In David Harvey's (2005: 152–82) formulation, neoliberal economic policies set in motion 'accumulation by dispossession' and upward redistribution of wealth, creating widespread social discontent. The adverse political and social fallout of the early measures of 'roll back' of the state then gave way to a new phase of 'roll out' of the state to bolster market mechanisms, and new institutions of governance were fashioned. 'Flanking mechanisms' were launched to manage the emerging crisis, and to help embed neoliberalism in society (Brenner and Theodore 2002a). The state actively promoted discourses of social capital and civil society, and participatory and decentralized governance to encourage private-sector involvement, citizen engagement, and community-based networks and activities to mitigate social exclusion (Peck and Tickell 2002). New forms of targeted social-policy measures, educational reforms for enterprise development, and workfare programmes were launched to stimulate prudent and responsible behaviour on the part of individuals and communities to help to manage the risks of economic fluctuations by enhancing their own skills and employability (ibid.; Peck 2001; Handler 2004). While a 'pluralized' state parcelled out many of its functions to non-state and subsidiary entities, it still exercised control indirectly through forms of audit, scrutiny, and monitoring of a large variety of institutions and organizations (Rose 1999: 153–5). At the same time, 'disciplinary neoliberalism' (Gill 1995) and highly interventionist policies of surveillance, punishment, and incarceration also emerged (Wacquant 2009). Widespread punitive measures were adopted as a form of 'government of social insecurity', leading to the criminalization of the poor who could not be socialized into workfare systems and who bore the brunt of dispossession and the 'precarization' of work at the lower reaches of society (ibid.).

In the international arena too, the post-Washington consensus enshrined many of these mutations and adaptations of neoliberalism, in the face of the hardship and political dislocation caused by the first tranche of structural adjustment programmes in developing countries (Hart 2002). In sustaining marketization by

espousing the notions of inclusive growth, human development, and good governance, neoliberalizing policies often drew upon the language and practices of emancipatory and radical politics to advance the notions of empowerment, participation, and community-based development. In this context, a political vocabulary and normative discourse developed to mobilize the participation of active, responsible, and vigilant citizens in running their own affairs and monitoring the performance of government. This is often cast in a language of social audit and social accountability (Jayal 2008), which in turn lends itself to appropriation by civil-society activists. This has gone hand in hand with a rights discourse that seeks to protect against social exclusion by acknowledging specific entitlements, for example, to food or education, as in the Indian context. Rather than preventing or redressing social inequality, social injustice, or exploitation, this rights discourse aims at a politics of inclusion and participation through institutional empowerment in local government, NGOs (non-governmental organizations), and community-based organizations. In these manifestations of 'soft neoliberalism' (Peck 2010: xiv), neoliberal and other languages of rights and empowerment, some derived from social movements, have become increasingly intermeshed.

A hallmark of neoliberal policies, then, is that they have proved to be highly adaptive and have yielded to modifications in the face of specific challenges, or to meet the demands of particular contexts and circumstances. Neoliberal policies have developed by inflecting, assimilating, and appropriating pre-existing languages and agendas of policy and politics, reconfiguring these with new meaning and purpose (Brenner and Theodore 2002a; Peck and Tickell 2002, 2007). Similarly, non-neoliberal notions and contested or oppositional ideas have been adapted and reinterpreted to serve the agenda of neoliberalization with varying degrees of success (Leitner *et al.* 2007). At the same time, movements of resistance and contestation have used languages that are analogous to neoliberal discourses (ibid.). Wendy Larner (2012: 278) refers to 'diverse actors involved who think they know neoliberalism when they see it, but are still not sure if they have been resistant, co-opted or complicit'. Thus, neoliberal projects not only have a contingent, hybrid, and multifaceted character, 'there are very few clean dividing lines between this project and its "other"' (Peck and Tickell 2007: 27). This makes it exceedingly difficult to specify neoliberal policies, discourses, and institutional practices in any context and to track the transformations that they bring about. Peck (2010: xii–xiii, 19) has recently argued that neoliberal*ism* is too static, 'regime-like', and rigid a concept for analytical purposes. He advocates instead an enquiry into 'socially produced' neoliberal*ization*, keeping 'processual definitions' as well as 'agents and agency in sight'. Taking a cue from this, instead of investigating neoliberal policies in India, in this book we take up one aspect of the neoliberalization process – that of the creation of enterprise culture – as an analytical framework to interpret the nature of social and cultural transformation in the wake of economic liberalization and the introduction of policies with neoliberalizing features. Instead of focusing on state policies, we explore public culture, everyday practices, and the lived experience of neoliberalization from the perspective of actors and agents.

Enterprise culture and self-making

Looking through the prism of enterprise culture is particularly apposite in the Indian case, in light of an overwhelming emphasis on, and ubiquity of, the idea of enterprise and the enterprising self in Indian public discourse, as seen above, and in many emerging areas of everyday practice that this book will explore. The importance of enterprise culture in neoliberalization is now well established in the analytical and theoretical literature from a variety of perspectives. In David Harvey's (2005: 2, emphasis added) definition:

> neoliberalism is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by *liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills* within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade.

Or, as Raymond Plant (1992: 85–6) puts it: '…individuals have to have enterprising attitudes if markets are to work, and there has to be a cultural climate that favours enterprise for them to work effectively.' Irrespective of the plurality of theoretical formulations and the hybrid practical expressions of neoliberalism, at its heart lies the enterprising *homo economicus* (Gordon 1991: 43). Given that the core of neoliberalism is the establishment of a market ethic, it follows that the *enterprise form* is required to be entrenched at the heart of society, in order to universalize rational economic conduct (Burchell 1993: 271–4; Lemke 2001: 195–7, 200). This entails extensive social intervention to achieve 'the generalization of an "enterprise form" to *all* forms of conduct – to the conduct of organizations, hitherto seen as being non-economic, to the conduct of government, and to the conduct of individuals themselves' (Burchell 1993: 275). For the market rationality of neoliberalism to succeed, individuals need to act with an entrepreneurial competitive logic of self-maximization in all contexts, and conduct themselves 'freely and rationally' (Burchell 1993: 276; Lemke 2001: 201–1). Moreover, enterprising qualities are associated mainly with individuals, from whom collective entities, such as a firm or a nation, derive their enterprising character (Keat 1991: 15). Thus, as seen above, India is now imagined as a nation of individual enterprising people.

Individual self-maximization as the basis of enterprising conduct is not, however, a 'natural', universal condition; nor is it likely to have easy purchase in the face of alternative historical constructions of self-hood and against the inheritance of the past, which privileged other values, including a 'social' rather than an individual imperative behind human action. It is necessary, therefore, to valorize and moralize the individual pursuit of the self, re-designating it in terms of a moral and virtuous quest for individual responsibility, self-actualization, and self-determination. As a consequence, 'the key feature of the neo-liberal rationality' emerges to be 'the congruence it endeavours to achieve between a responsible and moral individual and an economic rational actor' (Lemke 2001: 201). A

new conception of personhood and a normative resubjectification of the individual as an autonomous, free, and self-determined subject becomes necessary. This requires the re-engineering of human subjectivity and the social and cultural values on which it rests. The notion of freedom itself, in neoliberal enterprise culture, needs to be re-conceptualized as 'autonomy' and 'as the capacity to realise one's desire in one's secular life, to fulfil one's potential through one's own endeavours, to determine the course of one's existence through acts of choice' (Rose 1999: 84).

If market rationality is one key feature of neoliberalism, another is government from a distance. This is not a question of state truncation or withdrawal, but of a specific neoliberal modality of exercising political power, not through direct control (Gordon 1991: 2), but indirectly through the responsibilization of autonomous actors to make their own decisions and choices (Rose and Miller 1992: 199). This process shifts 'the regulatory competence of the state onto "responsible" and "rational" individuals' (Lemke 2001: 202). The logic of neoliberal governmentality then requires responsible, self-regulating, autonomous individuals to govern themselves in the context of a reconceptualized state project. To achieve this, institutional changes become necessary to create incentives for a range of non-state actors and entities to become active in the process of governance (Swyngedouw 2005). Political power and rule are 'consolidated and coordinated' through 'dispersed institutional and social networks' (Sharma and Gupta 2006: 9). The state plays a significant role in dismantling and recreating institutions, and in the pluralization of government to involve multiple dispersed non-state agents and sites, which respond to the institutional and discursive shifts brought about by changes in state policy (Gordon 1991: 36).

Both market ethic and the principle of indirect government, therefore, require the creation of enterprising human subjects who value autonomy, choice, and freedom, and 'give their lives a specific entrepreneurial form' (Lemke 2001: 202). They make an 'enterprise of themselves' by developing suitable 'techniques of the self', conducive to self-care and self-responsibilization (Burchell 1993: 276). Moreover, such individuals are expected to exercise an actuarial and prudential rationality for risk management, in order to mitigate against societal and systemic uncertainties and instabilities (O'Malley 1996). An individual's civic obligation is also stressed to help 'moderate the burden of risk he or she imposes on society' (Gordon 1991: 45). Neoliberalization, thus, depends on the development of self-regulation, self-direction, and self-management of enterprising selves. To generate consent for neoliberalism, and to construct 'neoliberal subjectivity', then, it is necessary to achieve the generalized acceptance or universalization of the norm of the 'enterprising self'. Moreover, the process of creation of new neoliberal subjects happens at the level of public culture and everyday practice through a range of state and non-state actors.

This is clearly evident in India, with multiple agents and institutions (state and non-state) seeking to create heightened aspirations and expectations, promoting the ideology of self-making, providing self-help and self-development tools, as well as purveying the evidence of success of self-propelled individuals

as a motivational instrument, as seen at the beginning of this chapter. With the mobilization of aspirations, dreams, and desires, new demands arise for self-development, self-advancement, and self-help. Multiple actors – 'experts in technologies of the self' – step in to cater to these needs, and in turn they modulate and configure the specific character and attributes of the 'self' to be engineered. The chapters in this volume examine the dynamics and mechanisms of this process of construction of self-hood, spanning Bollywood films, literary fiction, new religious practices, reality TV, new workplaces, schooling, skill-development and personality-development training schemes, and so on. In undertaking this analytical exercise, the authors here do not assume either that enterprise culture in India is now firmly entrenched in society, or that self-oriented enterprising conduct has become deeply rooted in personal practice. Instead the aim is precisely to probe the strengths and limitations of enterprise culture, its multivalent and contested nature, its relation to other forms of ideas, discourses, and practices, its differential appropriation from 'above' and 'below', its oppressive and exploitative functions, as well as its creative and liberating potentials.

The authors in this book examine the sociology and cultural politics of enterprise culture in the following three ways. In Part I, we analyse the culturally specific, socially contextualized and contingent ways in which techniques of the self and enterprising culture are being promoted and propagated through discourse and practice at multiple sites. In Part II, the chapters unearth how, and how far, new ideas about enterprising conduct, and practices and tools of self-making, are becoming embedded in everyday social and personal practice in relation to existing histories, traditions, and personal life trajectories. Part III explores how the emerging discourses and practices of the enterprising self and enterprise culture have contradictory implications, and how they might provide not only an ethic for individual behaviour but also a language and idiom in everyday life with which to debate and contest normative values, and to articulate class and other forms of conflict. While dealing with the above themes, several chapters also discuss the formation of youth and gender identities, as well as the social and cultural constitution of class, with a particular focus on various segments of the middle classes.

Meta-discourses on Indian enterprise culture

Paul du Gay refers (2004: 38) to Western advanced liberal democracies as being 'saturated' with enterprise discourses, but this would as easily apply to India. Some of the meta-discourses on enterprise and their key tropes are introduced here, based on some key texts and pronouncements at the national level. These set the scene for the detailed discussions in the various chapters of this book. The idea of enterprise is now being presented in numerous different ways, partly as an exaggerated affirmation of imagined 'Indian' entrepreneurial traits and achievements, and partly as an incitement to action. These discourses conjure up visions and ideas that are sought to be produced in reality.

'Our nation, though it has no drinking water, electricity, sewage system, public transportation, sense of hygiene, discipline, courtesy, or punctuality, does have entrepreneurs. Thousands and thousands of them.' These are the opening words of the protagonist of Arvind Adiga's (2008) Booker Prize winning novel *The White Tiger*, who writes an autobiographical letter to the Chinese Premier to enlighten him about India's enterprise culture. This evidently satirical comment about a nation of entrepreneurs in fiction, however, now appears to have been taken as a fact. The report on *Entrepreneurship in India* produced by the National Knowledge Commission of India (2008: 3) claims without a hint of irony that in India 'an entrepreneurial trait … has been as much a part of everyday living as its rich tradition of philosophy and speculation'. This fanciful essentialist notion that Indians are culturally and congenitally endowed with entrepreneurial acumen from time immemorial has had a meteoric ascendance in recent years, promoted and articulated by a vast range of actors and institutions in diverse but interconnected ways. Three different, but related, conceptions of enterprise and entrepreneurship are currently in circulation: one refers to business as a growth-oriented economic activity for the pursuit of prosperity; a second, more expansive, conception invokes distinctive personal qualities, such as individual initiative, daring, energy, and relentless striving; and a third points to a set of putatively quintessential Indian traits, such as a work ethic related to the notion of *karmayoga*, as well as ingenuity, resourcefulness, adaptability, and a determination to succeed. This latter is also associated with a vernacularized and democratized notion of enterprise as *jugaad* (usually defined as 'creative improvisation'), which is now projected as a much-vaunted feature of popular culture (Mankekar in this volume; Radjou *et al.* 2012).

The idea of India's unique work ethic as the basis of enterprise is typically expressed, for example, in a short promotional film entitled *I Am India* (c. 2006), commissioned by the India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF), which is a trust set up by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry of the Government of India, in alliance with private sector stakeholders such as the Confederation of Indian Industries. This film, designed to impress investors, depicts fast-moving, dynamic images of a high-tech India, while the sound track, created by the internationally renowned Indian composer and singer A. R. Rahman, consists of passages from the religious text Bhagavad Gita on *karmayoga:* the ethic of one's duty and imperative to work without consideration of the fruits of labour. Throughout the film, Indian men and women are shown holding a card with the image of a wheel – the Ashoka Chakra from the Indian national flag, depicting the eternal wheel of *dharma* (law). The film begins and ends with the following words: 'A man's karma is to forever turn the wheel of life towards a better future for all. The wheel of dharma is the unstoppable energy of life.' The film is described as

> a journey through emerging India, 'the fastest growing free market democracy in the world'. It celebrates the relentless spirit of the people of India, who through their karma give it a place amongst the leading economic nations of the world.
>
> (*I Am India c.*2006)

The above key notions of enterprise are expressed in a number of different ways. First, India's present Prime Minister is known frequently to quote John Maynard Keynes to celebrate the 'animal spirits of enterprise' as the single most important marker of enterprise culture, and as a key contributor to India's recent spectacular economic growth. The Prime Minister sees the success of Indian entrepreneurial activity as a proof in itself that Indians harbour the 'animal spirits', which, following Keynes, he describes as consisting of 'spontaneous optimism' and an 'innate urge to activity and creativity that makes the wheel go around'.[3] Second, enterprise and innovation are projected as nothing less than a generic, essential national, cultural, psychological, and even genetic, racial, or natural attribute of 'all' Indians. Pavan Varma (2004: 70–2), high-profile senior diplomat and best-selling author, waxes lyrical about enterprise as 'an irrepressible Indian trait', consisting of an ability 'to somehow find a solution, ingenuity, a refusal to accept defeat, initiative, quick thinking, cunning resolve'. Kamal Nath (2008: 4–6), government minister, sees enterprise as 'a suppressed Indian inventive gene', 'a deeply embedded Indian trait … hard-wired into the Indian psyche … and it comes naturally to India's people, with little or no hesitation or self-consciousness'. He claims that 'the Indian is an "insta-preneur", a portmanteau word for an instant entrepreneur'. Third, both Nath and Varma (ibid.; Varma 2004: 4–6), like many others, argue that Indians' essential and timeless enterprising disposition has been cultivated in the context of adversity and scarcity over the ages, particularly during the colonial and post-colonial periods. It is now, at last, realizing its full potential because entrepreneurial traits are now rewarded and nurtured by an economic and political system which does not constrain and stifle enterprise, but allows those traits free rein and full liberation. It is argued that this recent, but epochal, change has contributed to the development of self-reliance and initiative on the part of common Indians, who now pursue their own goals and well-being in the context of rising opportunities. Fourth, not only are Indians natural entrepreneurs, but also India's religious culture is argued to be uniquely hospitable to enterprise. Enterprise and materialism are held to be consistent with India's, or more precisely, Hindu India's, religious tradition and practice, and entirely compatible with spirituality, which is interpreted as devotion and religiosity, rather than other-worldliness (Varma 2004: 65–6; Nath 2008: 24).

From these and numerous similar accounts, the hallmarks of Indian enterprising self-hood, which is unrelated to business or economic activity per se, would appear to be inventiveness, ingenuity, tenacity, resourcefulness, self-reliance, resilience, risk-taking, initiative, innovation, adaptability, flexibility, pragmatism, ingenuity, and a strategic and tactical approach to problem solving, all of which enable individuals to seize their own destiny and rely on their own resources. Here, resonances with theoretical conceptions of the enterprising self, outlined earlier, are clearly quite striking, although the historical and cultural provenance of these attributes are, of course, construed to be essentially Indian and thus all the more potent. Individual enterprise, in both its senses of business activity and an aspiring, determined, and thrusting personality, is also projected

as a democratic, nationalist activity, ideally suited for the development of a mature, democratic, late post-colonial nation, to launch it on the path of economic growth and world dominance. The Hindi film *Guru*, mentioned above, based on the life of Dhirubhai Ambani of Reliance, lionized him as an entrepreneur who helped to place the country on the global economic map. He is also shown to produce wealth for his thousands of shareholders, thus emphasizing the democratizing effects of enterprise.

The deployment of entrepreneurial skills and the harnessing of an enterprise culture for the national project are not, of course, expected to remain confined to business and the economy, but are envisaged also to inform social action, politics, and government (Khanna 2007: 20). Sociopreneurs, or social entrepreneurs, are viewed as the agents of change who can find enterprising solutions to social and political problems and can deploy entrepreneurial skills to overcome social challenges, including those of poverty and deprivation. *The Times of India*'s annual Social Impact Awards, presented in alliance with the consultancy firm J. P. Morgan, are intended to recognize the achievements of enterprising people in the social sector:

> These Awards are an attempt to honor – and thus popularize – the activities of thousands of people who are not satisfied with sitting back and watching, who have taken the plunge and worked for delivering such essential needs to our compatriots as education, healthcare and decent livelihoods. These Awards will also recognize work towards saving the environment and empowerment of people.[4]

Here the notion of enterprise is detached from any profit-making connotation but remains moored in the sense of individual drive and initiative. This is also extended to politics and the professed need for enterprising action to cleanse and reinvigorate what is seen as India's corrupt public life, shambolic governance, and ineffective policy regime. The 'Lead India' campaign of 2007, mentioned above, and its later iterations, were designed with the explicit aim of inspiring and recruiting successful enterprising talents of private corporate India to join the realm of politics, to get rid of corruption, and deliver successful public policy. Kamal Nath (2008: 18–19) envisions India's successful, 'hectic, "overdrive"' democracy 'as a social analogue of the free market' and as a product of the exertions of active citizens with a recently energized enterprising bent of mind. These citizens, he argues, are now emboldened to demand political accountability, while also 'building grassroots coalitions to deliver utilities'. This imaginary resonates with the *aam admi* (ordinary person) model of politics, gaining rapid ascendance in India today, in which civic virtue rests with the individual ordinary person as the active, vigilant citizen, crusading against corrupt governance (Anjaria and Anjaria in this volume). Entrepreneurial reform of governance and the administrative services is, of course, widely advocated, with a more business-like, performance-oriented, and target-based mode of conducting public affairs, free from political meddling. Nandan Nilekani, in a journalistic

piece, held up Bangalore as the model for the 'city of the future', because it has the key advantage, in his view, in the form of a 'new breed of first time entrepreneurs' and 'educated, white collar, middle class workers', who are 'fully aware of best practices … [in] public services, governance and social welfare', many of whom, like himself, have thrown themselves into Public Private Partnerships or established NGOs for urban public management and development.[5]

The protagonists of this new entrepreneurial India, it is envisaged, will be young people. As the home of the youngest population in the world, India's 'demographic dividend' is construed to be one of her greatest strengths. Indian youth is now triumphantly presented as a creative and transformative force, not for its numerical preponderance alone, but for certain kinds of appropriate enterprising character attributes, mindsets, skills, and proficiencies that were apparently lacking in the previous generation. A new youthful persona now dominates public imagination, representing ambition, a spirit of adventure, and individualism, as well as aggressiveness to achieve a desired end – all projected to be fundamental qualities of the new generation of enterprising urban youth across India. Young people of 'small towns' and lower middle class youth, with aspirations of upward mobility, are associated, in particular, with an enterprising mentality (Mankekar in this volume). In 2008, the Indian press was seized with excitement about the 'Dhoni effect', as described in a study conducted by the consultancy firm Ernst and Young, to explore the mentality, preferences, and predilections of young people of small towns in so-called 'middle India', beyond 'metros' or metropolitan centres.[6] M. S. Dhoni, India's cricket Captain, comes from a small town in Bihar and he captured the nation's imagination by leading his team to victory in the 2007 T20 World Cup. Associated with a new aggressive, enterprising style of playing the game, reflective of India's new competitive spirit (Nilekani 2008: 81), Dhoni has become the icon of youthful dynamism of 'middle India'. Not surprisingly, Dhoni became the brand ambassador for Pepsi's advertising campaign entitled 'Youngistan' – meaning Land or Country of the Young, the inhabitants or citizens of which are portrayed as independent and individualistic, thrusting and irrepressible, who are determined to do their own thing in their own, uniquely innovative, way and are thus successful in attaining their goals, by surmounting all obstacles.

The poor too are projected as entrepreneurial assets of the nation (Roy 2010). They are now depicted as historically experienced self-reliant and enterprising innovators, because they are supposed to be adept at devising creative coping strategies in the face of adversity and endemic deprivation, both of which have existed for generations. Kamal Nath remarks (2008: 3–4, 26–7): 'Necessity, the old cliché goes, is the mother of invention. That must make scarcity the father of innovation.' As a result, 'India is a mass producer of entrepreneurs.… "Rags" to "riches" has become a routine journey in India.' The poor are celebrated as the practitioners of '*jugaad*' *par excellence*. This view is asserted throughout the print and electronic media and in government pronouncements and policy documents. Pavan Varma (2004: 74–6) sings paeans of praise to the 'grassroots entrepreneurial energy' of the 'veritable army of "footpath businessmen" ', whom he

describes as 'tenacious capitalists'. Similarly, C. K. Prahalad (2006), an international management guru of Indian origin with enormous influence in Indian official and private corporate circles, promulgated the existence of the 'fortune at the bottom of the pyramid', with the poor identified as ripe for market integration as efficient innovators, entrepreneurs, and potential consumers.

It is evident then from these over-arching discourses about enterprise that, for contemporary India, enterprise culture and the enterprising self are considered to be of central importance in producing both dynamic economic actors for a globalized, liberalized economy and self-governed citizens of a state that is being re-engineered primarily as an enabler of the market.

Discourses and narratives of enterprise

The first four chapters of this book engage in detailed analyses of various narratives and discourses of enterprise and the enterprising self, as expressed and promoted by private entities as well as in an increasingly well-developed sphere of collaborative and overlapping practices between the state and the private sector. The first two chapters examine the role of Bollywood films, which have, since the early post-colonial years, played a powerful role in shaping social and political ideas and debates, as Chakravarti notes in her chapter. The discursive construction of a new generation of enterprising youth as creative, innovative, inventive, and hyper-aspirational has been described above. These idealized characteristics of youth are embodied and enacted by the central characters in the film analysed by Mankekar. These young people represent upwardly mobile social segments in lower-middle-class neighbourhoods and in small towns, seeking to break out of their social and spatial location. Mankekar's analysis highlights how the depiction of ambition, entrepreneurial dynamism, and brash self-confidence of upwardly mobile youth attempts to create new forms of subjectivity through filmic fantasy. The marshalling of dreams and desires to create a new normative framework in favour of enterprising conduct has been seen above. Mankekar demonstrates that the mobilization of affect in aid of enterprise goes much further. Through her analysis of a particular filmic rendition of emotional dispositions and actions of young people, she draws attention to the portrayal of emotions in a recursive relationship with business, whereby the appeal of enterprise is imbricated in the subjective, intimate, and personal structures of feeling and of romantic love. Emotions have long been pressed into the service of capitalism through the deployment of emotional labour or the commodification of affect (Hochschild 1983, 2012; Illouz 2008), but Mankekar shows the discursive co-production of youthful love and love for business which recasts enterprise itself as a form of passion analogous to love, and not merely a source of material gratification. 'It's the romance, not the finance, that makes the business worth pursuing', as Nigel Thrift (2001) has suggested, albeit with a different argument in another context.

Chakravarti's chapter sets the discursive analysis of films in a political-economy context in which India's dominant film industry and its stars, as

'official' celebrity-brand ambassadors of the knowledge economy, are engaged in manufacturing consent for the government's educational policy. New education policy, which favours private provision, is nested in an ethic of competition and enterprise and is driven by a rationale of instrumental efficiency and goal-directed, performance-oriented learning, believed to be consonant with the needs of a modern technologized knowledge economy. This, however, sits uncomfortably with the ideal of universal education as a 'right' and as a mode of extending social inclusion, as enshrined in recent legislation. This is also at odds with the transformative urges of the model of liberal nationalist education, hitherto pursued in post-colonial India. Chakravarti notes that these fundamental contradictory impulses find little airing in public debates, but are tackled in Bollywood films, with their 'fantastic' imagination and critical erasures, and their formulaic narrative resolutions. Through her analysis of several mainstream education-themed films, directed at middle-class consumers of education and multiplex cinema audiences, Chakravarti argues that these films generate consensus behind private educational providers as being best suited to offer the right kind of entrepreneurial education which guarantees success and enables students to overcome all impediments – social constraints and physical or mental disability alike. Such education is projected as universally acceptable, not only because it is expected to provide effective training to middle-class children, but also because, in the films, it is shown to advance a moral purpose by providing suitable opportunities to nurture the exceptional talents and merits of the individual deserving poor child, under the personal initiative of heroic teachers, buttressed by the charity and philanthropy of appreciative and empathetic adults. Chakravarti thus shows that the process of ideological construction of an educational system in films is entangled with the idea of the market and enterprise, which also deliberately obscures the questions of systemic inequality and injustice by upholding the heroic poor child as its ethical pivot – an individual who can apparently excel against all obstacles. This narrative strategy serves to accommodate the inclusionary ambitions of educational legislation as well as middle-class social conscience, while obfuscating questions of unequal access and the inadequacies of a private system in educating the vast population of the poor.

The trope of dreams and aspiration, and the co-operation and collaboration between the state and the private sector in promoting enterprise culture, is the central theme of Nambiar's chapter, which addresses skill development – one of the most important and highly publicized recent policy initiatives of the government of India, encompassing 17 departments, and given high priority in the Eleventh Five Year Plan, backed by an outlay of nearly Rs. three billion. This initiative is designed to impart suitable skills to workers in a globalized, liberalized economy, and it responds to the labour requirements of the private sector faced with a shortage of suitable workers, especially in the lower reaches of the job market. The skill-development policy is financed by the government, but the training programmes are delivered by private-sector firms. Nambiar describes the process of recruitment and training by a skill-development organization, in this case a subsidiary of a large infrastructure finance company with investments

in textile industrial clusters. This organization, working in Tamil Nadu and Rajasthan among other places, mobilizes workers for garment-manufacturing plants. Nambiar poignantly describes the recruitment process in rural areas, in which the village square is turned into a job fair, and a festival of aspirations is created by recruiters with multimedia presentations that promise a bright future and enfranchisement in India's new economy. Following recruitment, a 30-day training programme seeks to create a new kind of worker who is suited to the needs of the labour market. The key aim of the training programme is not only to teach the technical skills of sewing and garment production, but also to stoke aspirations and instil new kinds of work ethic and enterprising attitudes, conduct, and behaviour through soft-skills programmes, a theme also taken up by Upadhya in this volume. Nambiar shows here the importance of emotional labour, not only in the service sector (Gooptu 2013), as usually believed, but also in the manufacturing sector.

The theme of transforming emotions and mental dispositions is also taken up by Gooptu in her discussion of new religious practices that seek to provide the tools of resubjectification of the individual in an enterprising mode. Religious identity in India has hitherto been interpreted in terms of collective mobilization or community construction, but new varieties of spiritualism, offered largely as lifestyle packages for mental and physical well-being, are concerned with the individual and personal subjectivity. Armed with the sacral power of Hindu religious systems, and having borrowed techniques from psychology and self-help literature as well as managerial practices in business, spiritualism in India in its present form concentrates on individual self-making on an unprecedented scale, targeting a mass audience. Spiritualism and ideas of enterprise inflect each other and offer hopes of self-transformation and worldly success. Within an all-pervading environment which promotes aspirations, spiritual teachings purport to provide the actual tools with which individuals can realize their dreams and goals. Spiritualism thus assembles the essential components of enterprise culture through the amalgamation of aspiration and action. With an emphasis on self-knowledge, soul-realization, and harnessing the power of the mind, spiritualism not only teaches a set of behavioural skills or conduct, but also highlights psychological and emotional reflexivity as an asset. Psychologization has, for a long time, been associated with neoliberalism, along with a therapeutic culture dominated by secular experts of the soul. In the Indian case, such expertise also rests firmly with religious specialists, who propagate the notion of a resilient, ancient religious tradition as the source of powerful self-care packages. Religion here is pressed into action in an essentialized construction of the Indian self as quintessentially enterprising.

Embedding enterprise culture in society

The set of four chapters in Part II turns to various ways in which enterprise culture and practices are being embedded in society and appropriated in everyday practice, in terms of social relations, personal histories, and life trajectories. These chapters

suggest a degree of convergence and congruence between inculcation from the 'top' and adoption from the 'bottom' through a dialogic process.

Upadhya focuses on India's high-profile IT sector in Bangalore and on new forms of human-resource management practices that eschew top-down control of workers, seeking instead to socialize them into the values of independence, initiative, self-reliance, and proactive conduct, all designed to prepare them effectively for work in global corporations and their local units. Reminiscent of Nambiar's skill-training schemes, the soft skills of effective communication, assertiveness, developing 'powerful' and 'popular' personality types, stress management, teamwork, and so on are taught to workers in IT firms. These skills are expected to enhance workers' productivity, performance, and efficiency. An army of consultants now train IT workers to develop these mental and affective skills, within a wider ecology of self-help and personality-enhancement tools and experts. Upadhya observes that some employees were openly critical of some of these techniques, and that they only took on board selected elements instrumentally to help with their work, rather than attempting a wholesale change in their personality types or imbibing entire value systems. Upadhya also analyses how spirituality is marshalled to instil economic rationality and promote self-management, self-motivation, well-being at work, teamwork, and leadership qualities. She presents the case of two spiritual *gurus* (teachers or preceptors): one borrows nuggets from religious texts or epics and stirs them in with management techniques; the other seeks to help workers through spiritually enhanced emotional interventions. Upadhya, however, argues that this is not a unidirectional process of moulding enterprising subjects through managerial and spiritual practices from the top. IT workers use psychological and spiritual training to re-engineer their *own* souls and to enrich and enhance their own lives, often because of their lack of consent or misalignment with corporate and managerial culture. They reinterpret the mental and spiritual skills imparted in the workplace, not to fall in line with a corporate ethos, but to create their own space outside corporate culture. While Upadhya's chapter demonstrates the widespread circulation of technologies of the self and enterprising self-making in workplaces, her chapter also suggests that those who partake of these techniques do not yield passively to the 'government of their soul' and the recasting of their subjectivity.

Individual agency is similarly emphasized by McGuire in her account of young people seeking out Personality Development and Enhancement (PDE) techniques in Delhi. They do not do so at the behest of any workplace institution, but choose to do so themselves in an effort to assert their urban cosmopolitan status, transcending their own suburban, provincial, or rural origin. They aspire to develop a 'professional' persona suited to new urban spaces of work and consumption, in the course of their personal trajectory of migration and urbanization. Beset by an anxiety to fit into the new spaces of urban sociability and youth culture – coffee shops and malls – as well as driven by a desire for upward class mobility through jobs in the modern corporate economy, these young people seek to become well versed in the manners and mores of an urban,

affluent social stratum. The emphasis of PDE training is not just on attitudes and mental skills, but on somatic and embodied practices, through which to gain confidence and a faith in one's own agency and to develop a sense of spatial belonging. PDE courses teach lifestyle skills and an embodied expression of professionalism through proper comportment, posture, gait, clothing, and fashion, as well as social etiquette, manners, suitable ways of conducting personal relations, and even the habit of going to the gym. These are seen as highly important assets in enhancing one's life chances, which the PDE classes highlight by starting with the chant 'Be the master of your life', as McGuire notes. The modification of outward somatic practices and inward resubjectification through gaining confidence and developing a sense of agency are all seen to be located in a continuum. Yet there is a tension between individuality and conformity. PDE training, while seeking to uphold the notions of unique personality and self-government, also teaches the skills to conform with the behavioural markers suited to the city and its new culture, effacing the traces of rural, regional, and class origin, even that of 'Indianness' in some cases, when young people are required to work in 'global' workplaces, such as call centres. However, like Upadhya, McGuire notes that these young people did not practise the lessons of embodied professionalism in all contexts, but confined them only to places where they were needed. They, thus, appear to make an instrumental use of their skills, rather than internalizing the underlying rationality and values, as Upadhya too argues for Bangalore's IT workers. Although McGuire does not explicitly address this issue, it might be surmised that by trying to 'fit in' and accessing PDE training, these young people also buy into the enterprise value system of personally bearing the costs, and assuming the risks and responsibility for enhancing their employability and making investments for self-development.

The chapter by Cross presents the biography of Madhu, a young man in Visakhapatnam, who does appear to have moulded himself into an enterprising subject quite thoroughly, and has taken it upon himself to disseminate the message to the young students whom he coaches and seeks to inspire to do charitable and environmental work. However, Cross emphasizes that Madhu's espousal of an enterprising conduct and a thorough-going ethic of personal progress cannot be simply attributed to his exposure to self-development ideas at his workplace early in his career. Rather, it owes a great deal to the role model of his adoptive father, who struggled to succeed in life after losing his own father at a young age. Madhu's enterprising persona also derives from his own sense of commitment and duty towards his family. Cross, therefore, draws out the significance of personal and family histories and kinship relations in the development of Madhu's enterprising life trajectory. Yet the story is complicated by a display on the wall of Madhu's room extolling self-motivation and self-construction. The display, initially laid out to fortify his own resolve and subsequently much embellished for the edification of his tutorial pupils, shows that he had clearly embraced some of the key messages of self-management and self-development lessons circulating in corporate contexts, to which he had been exposed early in his career as an employee in a global firm in an SEZ (Special Economic Zone).

Here, personal history and corporate training appear to have co-produced Madhu's subjectivity. Unlike the young people discussed in Upadhya's and McGuire's chapters, Madhu has not merely deployed a selected range of techniques instrumentally for specific purposes, but he appears to have internalized the values of self-improvement and self-driven success as guiding principles in his life. Perhaps not surprisingly, he was drawn to musical talent competitions, which epitomize how the virtues of merit and hard work can lead to success, and thus represent, in paradigmatic form, the values of enterprise culture. However, Cross argues that Madhu's story shows his exercise of agency in appropriating the ideas and practices of reflexive self-making, rather than a top-down process of ideological indoctrination or socialization. The mottos of aspiration, motivation, enterprise, and agency, emblazoned on Madhu's wall, do not demonstrate these to be instruments of the domination of corporate culture, but reveal them to be a set of ideas available for contested appropriation by people like Madhu and then re-engineered as a set of personal beliefs. Even though Madhu's life appears to be a blueprint for the cultivation of 'the self as enterprise', Cross notes that this is 'interwoven with located social histories of upward mobility', as well as the capacity and desire of individuals to refashion themselves for a range of different personal reasons – affective relations with kin, influence of an inspirational teacher, sense of social duty, spatial mobility in search of work, and even a motor accident.

In a similar vein, Gooptu and Chakravarty explore the world of 'housewives' in Bengal, who have been drawn into the ambit of reality-TV programmes, to discuss how the power and popularity of these programmes arise from their potential to transform personal subjectivity, private lives, and relationships. The proliferation of women-centric reality-TV shows is driven by the need to mobilize housewives as consumers; but women's response to and involvement in these programmes relate to the regional social history and domestic politics of familial roles and gender subordination, as well as women's highly personalized understanding and interpretation of the potential to redefine identity and personhood through the medium of TV. One optic to interpret the impact of these shows is to note how they advance the values of enterprise culture by encouraging women to seek self-expression through competitive success in game shows. Similarly, these TV programmes commodify the 'private' realm of housewives, who become complicit in the public display of their homes and emotions on TV for entertainment, not to mention partaking in the consumerist ethic that is integral to these programmes through advertising and product placement. This is not so much a flawed interpretation as a limited or partial one. Another analytical perspective is to consider how women themselves participate in the dissolution of the private–public divide and in this way define new identities and spaces for themselves, in the course of their involvement as viewers and participants in these programmes. Women see new possibilities of forging self-hood in the interstices of the market-driven media promotion of the 'enterprising housewife', and their self-construction exceeds the meaning and logic inherent in the shows.

These chapters clearly show that facets of enterprise culture and conduct are being embedded in Indian society through personal and social struggles and practices, sometimes with unintended consequences. Undoubtedly enterprise culture is reshaping and recasting subjectivity and social relations, although it is debatable whether enterprising value systems are being adopted wholesale. Certainly, the thorough resubjectification of individuals in an enterprising mould remains an open question.

Contestations and contradictions of enterprise culture

The next set of essays reveals the contradictions unleashed by enterprise culture that may undercut its very logic. They explore forms of contestation of enterprise culture and its multiple meanings and plural interpretations that vastly complicate the apparent homogeneity and uniformity of the celebratory rhetoric of enterprise and aspirational culture, seen earlier in this chapter. They, like some of the chapters in Part II, discuss how the language and imagery of enterprise are implicated in the process of class constitution and conflict, and in the construction of youth identity.

With a study based in Ernakulum, Sancho delves into the field of education that is usually seen as one of the key sites of neoliberalization. He convincingly shows how the strategies and choices of enterprising middle-class parents for their children's schooling and future career are determined by narrow instrumental concerns of examination success and employment prospects, and are driven by parental aspirations of upward mobility for the family, as well as considerations of class position and social status. An image of self-driven, ambitious, and competitive students now circulates in middle-class India. Sancho argues that it is not students themselves, but parents, who seek to propel their children into a competitive and enterprising mode, while promoting a myth of parental *laissez faire*, and purporting to confine their input merely to making monetary investments in their children's education. In reality, parents closely structure, monitor, and intervene in the details of their children's schooling in a highly discipline-oriented 'authoritarian' manner, as Sancho defines it. This yields a variety of outcomes, including adverse ones for some children, leading to failure rather than success in the terms set and expected by their parents. Most importantly, Sancho's narrative shows that the field of education is hardly the breeding ground of an ethos of competitive success, drive, and initiative that it is believed to be. Parental regimes of 'authoritarian' control often paradoxically achieve the opposite by stifling free thought, creativity, and independence of mind, as well as precipitating a sense of failure and under-achievement that is far from being conducive to the construction of enterprising self-hood and autonomous agency. The regimented discipline of the schooling experience, as shaped by parental preferences, appears to train children to pursue pre-determined career paths that are thought to be safe for income generation and economic mobility. This cements a mindset of risk-aversion and lack of initiative that would wholly undermine the desired qualities of an enterprising self. Apparently oblivious of

this, however, parents themselves make large financial investments in children's education, private tuition, and ancillary training, especially in the context of an ascendance of expensive private provisions. Parents thus assume a substantial burden of risk and economic hardship. This, Sancho argues, solidifies existing economic inequalities and status distinctions among various segments of the middle class, by imposing considerable economic demands on the less well-off sections. The parents also assume for themselves the task of producing an employable and skilled workforce. Sancho's chapter demonstrates the social and personal effects of the policies and mindsets being promoted in public discourse that Chakravarti discusses in her chapter about the privatization, commodification, and instrumentalization of education.

Nisbett's chapter returns to the realm of IT in Bangalore, seen through the prism of aspirations of young people who seek to enter or make a career in that sector. Young people are attracted by the siren call of the knowledge society and attempt to secure a place in it as their ticket to success. Chasing the IT dream, and persuaded by the discourse of unrelenting effort leading to eventual success, they make heavy financial and personal investment in the incremental acquisition of qualifications in courses that offer a range of skills that are apparently suitable for securing a stable foothold in the IT world. Motivated by the myth and aura surrounding the spectacular global success of a handful of iconic IT individuals and companies, IT aspirants seek to adopt an enterprising mode of promoting their employment prospects by attending costly, though often unnecessary courses, while labouring under the constraint of lack of information about the suitability of such courses in the job market. Their investments frequently do not yield the desired return of a stable IT job, and the personal and financial risks that they assume in accumulating qualifications and certificates often worsen their economic position. Their commitment to the enterprise discourse unravels in the face of reality, in which rags-to-riches stories are seldom to be found. Those lacking prior social and cultural capital of established middle-class status and education are often unable to break into the IT sector. 'Failed' IT aspirants then abandon with alacrity their faith in the narrative of entrepreneurial success in IT and resort to an 'older' and more familiar narrative of nepotism and corruption in the labour market to explain their lack of success, while ignoring the glut, uncertainty, and flexibility of the IT job market which, in fact, explains their failure to enter or remain employed in the IT sector. Nisbett's description demonstrates the power of the IT 'dream' and the persuasive message of adopting an enterprising conduct in serving to transfer the burden of IT training on to individual job aspirants, and thus also individualizing and personalizing risks that are systemic and generated by global market fluctuations and unstable job markets. Moreover, taking a cue from Upadhya's chapter, it is likely that the high uptake of spiritualism among IT professionals and aspirants is because these young people seek personalized strategies to cope with societal and structural problems by turning to spiritual self-help experts and the sacralized, psychologized therapeutics that they offer (also described by Gooptu).

Nisbett, Sancho, and McGuire show the class-specific implications of enterprise culture and the costs and risks being borne by those of modest means, especially in the lower reaches of the middle classes, contrary to the myth of success and passionate self-fulfilment that is spun by spiritual teachers, as discussed by Gooptu, or expressed in the films discussed by Mankekar and Chakravarti.

The class dimensions of enterprise culture, and its contradictions and discontents, are further elaborated by Anjaria and Anjaria in the spheres of urban politics and fictional narrative. Delving beneath the surface of the seeming uniformity of narratives and discourses of enterprise culture, they argue that the language of enterprise and entrepreneurialism does not offer a unified or monolithic ethic, or normative value system. Instead it harbours multiple meanings and serves as a terrain of contestation over competing interpretations and practices. While previous chapters concentrate on work, education, training, and the media, Anjaria and Anjaria turn their attention to the question of politics, class, and urban citizenship. They identify among Mumbai's elected municipal representatives and civil-society activists some exemplars of the ideal of the entrepreneurial citizen who cast themselves as self-responsible, active, and vigilant, and who seize the initiative to address urban problems without looking to the state. They embody the idealized self-governing urban citizens described above. Yet, in their quest to establish citizen-driven urban governance and to create clean, orderly, and environmentally sustainable cities fit for middle-class living, these enterprising citizens resolutely arraign themselves against street hawkers and informal traders, who are apparently pampered by vote-seeking politicians. However, the denizens of the urban informal economy are otherwise hailed as the epitome of India's spirit of enterprise and the quintessential exponents of '*jugaad*' at the 'bottom of the pyramid'. Indeed, those engaged in economic activities on the street assert their counter-claims to space and the right to pursue their small-scale entrepreneurial activities. These conflicting conceptions of enterprise here map on to political struggles over space and class in the city. In a different vein, the enterprising civic activists, while advocating urban renewal, private investment in the city, infrastructure development, and even gentrification, at the same time oppose 'land grab' for commercial development and profit-making ventures of consumerist excess. They target the icons of entrepreneurialism at the apex of the economic pyramid in high-end business and the private corporate sector, often in alliance with politicians. Although the chapter does not fully discuss the political ramifications, it is clear that efforts here to privilege particular notions of virtuous enterprise over others are deeply entangled with contemporary debates in India over citizenship rights, the role of non-state actors and the private corporate sector, and social audit and accountability in urban governance (Jayal 2008).

Anjaria and Anjaria also discuss fictional and filmic narratives on enterprise and business, which, far from engaging in an unqualified celebration, expose the moral and practical limitations of entrepreneurialism, as well as its dysfunctional and dark underbelly. They show convincingly that the idea of enterprise as business or economic success is clearly not hegemonic and also that it lacks any

fixed connotations about the means and ends that might be considered successful or normative. The literary critiques of economic enterprise analysed in this chapter, notably by Chetan Bhagat, reveal another interesting feature, not developed by the authors. In cases where entrepreneurs are depicted in fiction to have failed morally or to be suffering from a sense of personal unease despite economic or business success, they are also shown to have engaged in such actions as murder or bribery and collusion with politicians. These would, of course, not be considered enterprising acts of self-responsible subject agents. There is then clearly a critique of the unfettered pursuit of wealth and success by entrepreneurs, and the entanglement of dirty politics and shady business. However, the virtuous attributes of responsibility and restrained, ethical self-government of the enterprising self are not in question. Indeed, these are precisely the values that are held up by Chetan Bhagat as the characteristics of those posited against amoral and unrestrained economic entrepreneurs. Moreover, the latter fail to measure up to the idealized yardstick of the enterprising self, because they appear to violate a cardinal principle underlying the idea of enterprise: that of a free market. The entrepreneurs, criticized in film and fiction, are those who undermine the free operations of the market by resorting to corruption and crime. These are the 'old' nefarious ways of conducting business and enterprise, juxtaposed against the desirable 'new' clean, self-reliant, responsible, self-fulfilling forms of enterprise, in a supposedly free and moral market. The ethic of the market and the ideal enterprising self seem to emerge unscathed, indeed vindicated, from the fictional critiques of economic entrepreneurialism as unethical conduct.

The final chapter of the book turns to these questions of 'old' and 'new' ways of doing business, and our exploration of enterprise culture ends with Krishnamurthy's study of a physical market as a site of trade and business. The wholesale grain *mandi* (market) of Harda in Madhya Pradesh has undergone a radical transformation in the past three decades in the wake of economic liberalization, with implications not only for economic behaviour, but also for forging new mindsets. From the perspective of this market and 'old' business, new enterprise is found to be deficient in many ways, relating to the reformed operation of the market through the technological integration of trading systems, the faster electronic transmission of information, globalized product flows, and the entry of large corporate players. Erstwhile powerful players in the *mandi* gloss over the flaws of their own practices, and instead lament the loss of the previous culture of economic interdependence in the locality, the emergence of individualist conceptions of business in an impersonal technologized market, and the powerful sway of large-scale corporate capital. They point to the irony of the re-regulation of commodity-trading activities by the state, which has eroded the livelihood of many traders in the wholesale market, juxtaposed against the state-promoted runaway privatization and commodification of social goods, such as health and education, that have opened up new business opportunities for those willing to seize the day. These are, of course, the points of view of those who have not stood to benefit from recent developments in the *mandi*. However, their critique

takes us back to our starting point: that the new idea of enterprise as an individual, self-driven project, nested in the ethics of the market, has wrought extensive changes in 'real' markets and businesses, and also far beyond these in many other realms of society and culture.

The purpose of this volume is to cast enterprise culture as an analytical framework through which to grasp the nature and extent of India's neoliberalization. With that aim, the chapters have shown the myriad manifestations of enterprise culture and the enterprising self in public culture, social practice, and personal lives, ranging from attempts to construct hegemonic ideas in public discourse, to appropriations by individuals and groups with unintended consequences, to forms of contested and contradictory expression. Through the lens of enterprise culture, these chapters reveal a number of different key areas of transformation in contemporary India. In particular, by going beyond the realm of state policy and institutional politics, the chapters have shown the emergence of new forms of subjectivity and everyday practice.

Notes

1 Abridged extracts from 'India *vs* India', campaign video for 'India Poised: Our Time is Now', produced by *Times of India*, 2007. The anthem was recited by the film star Amitabh Bachchan.
2 Abridged extracts from the campaign video for 'Lead India', produced by *Times of India*, 2007. This anthem was read by the film star Shah Rukh Khan.
3 Speech given by the PM to release a commemorative postage stamp on Shri Walchand Hirachand to mark the 121st anniversary of his birth, available online at: http://pib.nic.in/release/rel_print_page.asp?relid=5033, accessed 28 March 2013.
4 Times of India Social Impact Awards website, available online at: http://timessocialawards.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/, accessed 4 April 2013.
5 Nandan Nilekani (2008a) 'In the "city of the future"', in *Imagining India*, Notes, 16 December, available online at: http://imaginingindia.com/2008/12/16/in-the-city-of-the-future/. Also available at *DNA (Daily News and Analysis)*, 16 December (electronic newspaper published by Diligent Media Corporation: Dainik Bhaskar Group and Zee TV), available online at: www.dnaindia.com/report.asp?newsid=1214400, accessed 5 January 2009.
6 'Waking up to the Dhoni effect', *The Financial Express*, 13 May 2008, available online at www.financialexpress.com/news/waking-up-to-the-dhoni-effect/308825, accessed 4 April 2013.

Part I

Discourses and narratives of enterprise culture

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1 ‘We are like this only’

Aspiration, *jugaad*, and love in enterprise culture

Purnima Mankekar

In the 1990s, shortly after the introduction of transnational satellite television in India, a new television network, Channel V, launched a music video programme that cast itself as an indigenous version of MTV. Called VTV, this programme remixed popular Western music with Bollywood songs, accompanied by commentary in a patois of Mumbai slang, Bollywood Hindi, and English. Channel V did not compete for viewers with the hugely popular imported MTV. Instead, it attempted to carve out its own niche: lower-middle-class youth living in cities and small towns who were not fluent in English but who, nevertheless, aspired to become globally-savvy consumers of the new transnational popular cultural texts that were in circulation at the time.

The title of this chapter is taken from the promos for VTV, the tagline for which was ‘We Are Like This Only’. Through humour and the deployment of streetwise language, ‘We Are Like This Only’ sought to herald the arrival on the national (and, eventually, global) stage of new protagonists – lower-middle-class youth living in urban areas who refused to apologize for their lack of fluency in English, lack of social status, or precarious class position. ‘We Are Like This Only’ emblematized the brash self-confidence of a new demographic that marketers and advertisers would later seize upon and term ‘the aspirational classes.’[1] These consumerist desires, and the fantasies of social mobility with which they were conjoined, were frequently at complete variance with the structural positions and struggles of lower-middle-class subjects living in cities and small towns.[2] Despite these disjunctures – or more likely *because* of them – in many popular texts (for example, advertisements, television narratives, and films) lower-middle-class youth are represented as the protagonists of a New India poised to assume its place in the world: these young people are valorized as risk-taking, hard working, self-sufficient, willing to pull themselves up by their bootstraps – and driven by an aspiration to make money at any cost.[3]

As an anthropologist of media, I am concerned with how media produce and represent these characteristics or ‘choices’ as normative, even as they make them available to contestation; more broadly, I am interested in how media shape the formation of subjectivities through their ideological and affective work (Mankekar 1999, 2004, 2008, 2012). It is important to note that VTV was not merely targeting a certain demographic, but recursively constituting it. Elsewhere

I have argued that television audiences are not pre-constituted; on the contrary, television hails an audience into being by tapping into desires and predilections salient at a particular historical moment (Mankekar 1999, 2012).[4] The semantic and grammatical formation of the phrase 'We are like this only' implies – and constitutes – a specific enunciative location: that of a particular segment of urban, lower-middle-class youth whose imperfect English indexes their class position but who, nonetheless, unapologetically aspire to upward mobility. Perhaps most significantly 'We are like this only' is also what J. L. Austin might term an illocutionary act because of its *performance* of a campy take-it-or-leave-it attitude on the part of lower-middle-class youth that it both claims to represent and hails into being (1975).[5] Finally, this phrase evokes ways in which, presumably, lower-middle-class youth may talk back to upper-class elites whose speech patterns enact their access to elite education. In short, 'We are like this only' enacts a particular positionality through its performance of defiance, self-confidence, and aspiration.

These youth are also presumed to be driven by their ability to engage in *jugaad*, a colloquial term connoting the ability to come up with creative solutions that enable one to fulfil one's aspirations in contexts of scarce resources. In many media representations, young people, perhaps more than children, are represented as symbolizing the futurity of the Indian nation.[6] 'We are like this only' emblematizes the self-constitution of these new protagonists as synecdochic of the self-representation of the nation as it embraces a reconfigured enterprise culture: unapologetic, self-confident, brash – and driven by aspirations to do better than their parents. In celebratory media accounts, this generation of lower-middle-class youth is portrayed as markedly different from both their parents' generation and their middle-class and upper-class peers, in that their aspiration and capacity for *jugaad* replace education, job security, and, to some extent, old-fashioned notions of respectability as a pathway to upward mobility.

Specifically, my objective in this chapter is to interrogate the role of popular media, exemplified in the blockbuster Hindi film *Band Baaja Baaraat* (2010: directed by Maneesh Sharma; produced by Yashraj Films), in the production and circulation of narratives of enterprise culture during a historical moment marked by neoliberal refashionings of success, growth, and progress. As I will argue later, *Band Baaja Baaraat* valorizes the work ethic, spirit of risk-taking, and self-sufficiency of its lower-middle-class protagonists as they successfully traverse the class-polarized spaces of New Delhi. In addition, I am interested in tracing how contemporary constructions of enterprise culture might be deeply imbricated with discourses of love and romance. In so doing, I engage with scholarship on the relationship between capital, on the one hand, and a domain frequently associated with the private, the subjective, and the intimate: that of romantic love.[7]

Before proceeding with my analysis of *Band Baaja Baaraat* I need to insist on some important caveats. First, unlike some of my other research on Indian media, the scope of my analysis here is limited, in that it is not a study of the reception of this film. Instead, my objective is to trace how it may have participated in the

production of specific discourses about enterprise culture. Second, representations of enterprise culture in recent Hindi films have been varied and heterogeneous, ranging from the valorization of enterprise in films like *Guru* and *Bunty aur Babli*, to an unflinching portrayal of its seamy underside in *Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye!* and *Shanghai*. And last, but perhaps most important, it is crucial to note that, in analysing representations of enterprise culture in *Band Baaja Baaraat*, I aim neither to predict nor to analyse the behavioural 'effects' of such films. Rather, as I have outlined above, I am interested in how popular films like *Band Baaja Baarat* represent the co-implication of enterprise culture and specific structures of feeling.

In the next section I will engage in a more detailed analysis of *Band Baaja Baaraat'*s representations of aspiration, *jugaad*, and the relationship between commerce and romantic love; for now, let me briefly summarize its plot. *Band Baaja Baaraat* is about two lower-middle-class protagonists, Shruti Kakkar and Bittoo Sharma, who attend college at Delhi University. Shruti's ambition is to become a wedding planner. Bittoo, on the other hand, has no goals or ambitions; he falls asleep in class; he roams Delhi University with his buddies, teasing young women. Bittoo is attracted to Shruti but is rebuffed by her because she wants to steer clear of romance so that she can focus on her wedding-planning business. Shortly thereafter, Bittoo impulsively declares to his father that he will start a wedding-planning business. But when he proposes to Shruti that they become business partners, she refuses point-blank. She is concerned that their partnership might develop into a romantic relationship, and she has no time for romance. More importantly, she wishes to adhere to the most important principle of her life and her business: love and business cannot mix ('*jis se vyapaar karo, usse kabhi na pyaar karo*').

But Bittoo is not one to give up so easily, and, through a series of manoeuvres, the two of them are hired by an upper-class wedding planner. Just before the wedding there is a fiasco in the matter of the flower arrangements, and Shruti is blamed and fired. The two of them walk out, partners in their new business. Although their first wedding is in Shruti's lower-middle-class neighbourhood, Janakpuri, their sights are set on planning weddings in enclaves of the rich and powerful like Sainik Farms: the class-polarized topography of New Delhi provides them with a geographic and aspirational map to plot their plans for upward mobility. Eventually, Bittoo and Shruti hustle their way to organizing a wedding in Sainik Farms and, hence, are able to literally and symbolically traverse the distance from Janakpuri to Sainik Farms. After they successfully pull off this ostentatious and expensive wedding, they celebrate with dancing and champagne. When the celebrations end, aided by a combination of fatigue and alcohol, they end up in each other's arms and have sex. But Bitto is afraid that Shruti might have fallen in love with him and is concerned that they might have broken the cardinal rule of their business: that love and business cannot mix. He starts to distance himself from her. Her feelings hurt, Shruti terminates their partnership. They each begin their own business, but their individual projects fail miserably.

One day, they are approached by a wealthy hotelier whose spoilt daughter wants them to plan her wedding because she finds their kitschy arrangements exotic and novel. But he will not give them this project unless they work together, because, as he points out, individually they have accomplished nothing but spectacular failure. In the course of planning this wedding, they become friends again and, eventually, reconcile. The film closes with the two of them dancing joyfully at their own wedding.

Enterprise culture and its structures of feeling

A voluminous scholarly literature exists, which demonstrates just how illusory such portrayals of enterprise culture are for millions who struggle to survive in contemporary India (see, for example, Jeffrey *et al.* 2007). There is absolutely no question that the world depicted in films like *Band Baaja Baaraat* is a fantasy. That said, we must be wary of the traps inherent in conceptualizing fantasy and reality as binary opposites. I have argued elsewhere that fantasy and reality are co-implicated (Mankekar 2004, 2012). Furthermore, as Zizek points out, fantasy provides the coordinates for desire (1989).[8] In *Band Baaja Baaraat*, it is these desires – to make money, become successful, and attain social status – that fuel Shruti and Bittoo's aspirations and their enthusiastic and energetic adoption of enterprise culture: therefore, to analyse this film in terms of whether or not it reflects reality completely misses the point. And, to reiterate, nor am I interested in evaluating its impact in behaviourist terms: I have no desire to investigate whether, or how many, of its viewers planned to open their own business after watching the film. Instead, I am concerned with how this cinematic text might represent certain desires and aspirations as normative at a particular historical moment, and how these desires and aspirations articulate with discourses of enterprise culture hegemonic at this time.

In steering away from the positivist hubris of establishing a linear relationship between media texts and the behaviour of viewers or spectators, I draw on Raymond Williams' conceptualization of structures of feeling. In his groundbreaking work, Williams indicates how we may interrogate a work of art in terms of the structures of feeling that it materializes and enacts. He defines structures of feeling as 'social experiences *in solution*, as distinct from other social semantic formations which have been precipitated and are more evidently and more immediately available' (Williams 1978: 133–4, emphasis in original). This framing of structure of feeling problematizes the binary between feeling and thought: as Williams argues, structure of feeling is not 'feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought' (ibid.: 132).[9] At the same time, he asserts, 'We are also defining a social experience which is still in process, often indeed not yet recognized as social but taken to be private, idiosyncratic, and even isolating' (ibid.).

While the primary unit of analysis in Williams' theorization of structure of feeling is the literary text, I am interested in how a popular film, *Band Baaja Baaraat*, materializes structures of feeling which cohere around representations

of enterprise culture on two interlinked registers: its aesthetics and its diegesis. In these representations, aspiration and *jugaad* are deemed critical to an emergent set of ethics promoted by neoliberal renditions of enterprise culture; last but not least, enterprise culture and romantic love are depicted as co-implicated and mutually dependent.

Aspiration

Aspiration is the leitmotif of *Band Baaja Baaraat*. As the credits roll, we hear what the film-makers have termed the 'anthem' of the film: the opening frames consist of a background song which introduces us to the importance of *tarkeebain* (a Hindi–Urdu word which I have translated as 'plans' or 'schemes') in the story that is to follow.[10] The song begins: 'Plans, plans, [we have] so many plans, Plans, plans, we have many plans, we have vivid [colourful] dreams, And we have lots of plans' ('*Tarkeebein, tarkeebein kitni hai tarkeebein, Tarkeebein, tarkeebein apni hai tarkeebein, Satrangi sapne hai, atrangi tarkeebein*'). Intercutting frames present the film's hero and the heroine, foregrounding the similarities in their socio-economic backgrounds. Shruti and Bittoo are students at Delhi University and, for those familiar with this campus, it is evident that they do not attend elite colleges. Their clothes are inexpensive, and they either use cheap public transportation like cycle rickshaws or buses (in Shruti's case) or, as with Bittoo, ride three to a motorcycle. Nor do they engage in expensive consumption practices: thus, we see them eating at roadside stalls rather than at fancy restaurants. For all the similarity in their class positions, their personalities are very different. When we first see Shruti, she is smiling, her eyes gazing skywards dreamily; in the next frame we see her closely examining some drawings: the suggestion is that she is a dreamer with plans. She is assertive and protective of her dignity: we see her arguing with a cycle rickshaw driver, apparently, over the rate that he has charged her; in another frame we see her retaliating against a man who has tried to grope her as he walks past her. It is evident that Shruti is the one with ambitions and with plans for how she can accomplish her goals, as opposed to Bittoo, who is, at best, a wastrel.

We see signs of Shruti's no-nonsense commitment to enterprise culture from the start. As she walks past a young couple romancing, she rolls her eyes in disdain; all that she focuses on is the course of action that she needs to follow (the *tarkeebein*) to realize her dream: that of opening her own business. She is the one with the fire in the belly, the drive and ambition to succeed. As the narrative unfolds, however, Bittoo quickly transforms himself into an enterprising young man who will use his wits to get what he wants, even if it means engaging in unethical behaviour. Shruti has her life planned out and has formulated, in astounding detail, the trajectory that she needs to follow in order to fulfil her ambition: she will begin by assisting successful wedding planners and, once she has acquired the necessary contacts and experience, will branch out on her own. Armed with a folder which details the different kinds of wedding that she will organize (Barbie Theme, Fairy Tale Theme, Circus Theme, etc.), she even has a

name for the business that she wants, eventually, to open: Shaadi Mubarak (which may be translated as 'best wishes on your wedding').

As they start their business, Shruti and Bittoo have access to neither financial nor cultural capital, but this, rather than discouraging them, generates in them the aspiration to move towards their goals with zeal and ingenuity. They do not pretend to be sophisticated, and the language they speak foregrounds their class positions and lack of cultural capital: neither is able to speak English fluently, but this is never a source of embarrassment to them. For instance, Bittoo is completely unselfconscious about the fact that he mispronounces the word 'business' as 'biness'. And, while her English is marginally better, Shruti speaks a version of Hindi commonly associated with lower-middle-class Delhi residents. Bittoo and Shruti are comfortable with who they are and make no apologies for their lack of sophistication: they are like this only. Yet, they have lofty aspirations: to become Delhi's most successful wedding planners.

The film represents enterprise culture from the vantage point of its lower-middle-class protagonists and suggests that relatively marginalized youth can aspire to make their place in the new economy via the service industry: the protagonists launch a business that enables them to manage the conspicuous consumption practices of others and, in the process, make money themselves. In this film (and in countless other media texts) social mobility is represented as imbricated with consumption. As Shruti informs Bittoo (and us) at the beginning of the film, regardless of the economic health of the country, wedding planning will always be profitable: 'Whether there is recession or inflation, people will always spend money on weddings. I will help them spend that money.' Let us not forget that, as wedding planners, the job of Shruti and Bittoo is to transform what was conventionally a celebration organized within kinship and community networks into a money-making and money-displaying project. The film underscores the highly competitive nature of the wedding-planning business: families vying with each other to host lavish weddings depend on wedding planners to organize novel and ostentatious projects. It is important to note that the film does not foreground the consumption practices of its protagonists as a measure of their ascent up the class ladder. Instead, it focuses on their management of the consumption practices and desires of others through their production of weddings as spectacles of consumption.

Unlike many contemporary Hindi films that erase the role of class in the lives of their protagonists or focus entirely on upper-class characters, *Band Baaja Baaraat* portrays the aspirations of its protagonists as nested in the lower-middle-class world that they inhabit. This world is represented through their kitschy clothes and tastes. Yet the film is never patronizing in its representation of Shruti and Bittoo's tastes: the gaudy and ostentatious weddings that they organize are affectionately represented as spaces of excitement and fun, as suffused with colour, music, good food, and dancing. (Here, *Band Baaja Baaraat*'s valorization of kitsch contrasts with the fetishization of upper-class elegance in films like *Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham* and the dystopic representation of kitsch in *Dev D*.) For most of the film, they wear gaudy clothes that would, in Delhi slang, be described as *dhinchaak* (which may be glossed in English as gaudy).

Yet Shruti and Bittoo's kitschy tastes and love for the *dhinchaak* are precisely what enable them to compete and win wedding-planning projects of elite clients. As the upper-class father of one bridegroom declares, the bride and bridegroom-to-be spend their days in corporate boardrooms wearing black and brown, and this is exactly why they want to have a wedding that is *dhinchaak.* Certainly, all the weddings that Shruti and Bittoo plan are loud, ostentatious, and, regardless of the class of their clients, kitschy. In the parlance of marketing experts, kitsch is Shruti and Bittoo's 'USP' (unique selling point). The film foregrounds the potency of aspiration and its centrality to enterprise culture precisely through its portrayal of the lower-middle-class world, the kitschy and *dhinchaak* aesthetics of its protagonists, which lends a particularly potent poignancy to their aspirations. *Band Baaja Baaraat* thus constructs aspiration as affective, as generative of the agency of its protagonists, specifically, of their irrepressible drive to succeed and make money.

Jugaad *as 'mindset'*

If the language that Shruti and Bittoo speak, the clothes they wear, and the dominant aesthetic of the weddings that they organize highlight their lower-middle-class sensibilities and aspirations, *Band Baaja Baaraat* also strongly suggests that by their hard work and, most importantly, their spirit of *jugaad* and self-confident risk-taking, they can transform their class position. I posit that *jugaad* entails not simply a business strategy or even a strategic plan of action for achieving one's goals but, in the words of its proponents, a 'mindset'.[11] *Jugaad* thus problematizes assumed dichotomies of thought versus feeling (Williams 1978) and affective versus instrumental action (Yanagisako 2002).

Early in the film we see that, for all his laid-back ways, Bittoo has the capacity to engage in *jugaad*: as if to presage the trajectory that he will follow, we see an entrepreneurial side to him. One evening, when he and others in his hostel are disgusted with the food they are being served, he learns that there is a wedding in the vicinity. He collects ten rupees 'entry fee' from some of his friends and takes them to the wedding, where they crash the dinner party and eat a grand meal. Shruti exhibits *jugaad* in her own way. After she and Bittoo launch their business, she shrewdly insists that their first project should be in her own lower-middle-class neighbourhood, Janakpuri. When Bittoo expresses his impatience (he wishes to work in a more affluent neighbourhood), she insists that their ability to manage with whatever resources they have at their disposal will lay the foundation for their future success. She argues that they can 'practise' in Janakpuri, which, after all, is her own community.

They are able to organize a successful wedding within a relatively small budget of Rs.2 lakhs because the so-called mindset of *jugaad* permeates everything they do: instead of holding the reception in a large hall, they organize it in the streets of the neighbourhood (*mohalla*); Bittoo subcontracts a friend to play the music; and he and Shruti provide the entertainment for the guests by dancing for them. In the end, the mindset of *jugaad*, of making do within the constraints

of their scarce resources, is precisely what enables them to pull off this wedding and others with spectacular success. *Band Baaja Baaraat* insists that in order to succeed in the new enterprise culture what you need is not education or what, in conventional terms, might be regarded as cultural capital, but the can-do mindset of *jugaad*.

This capacity to do *jugaad* and take risks is precisely what lands Shruti and Bittoo their first multi-million dollar business deal; it is this quality that enables them to traverse the distance from lower-middle-class Janakpuri to upper-class and *nouveau riche* Sainik Farms. In their first Sainik Farms project, the father of the bride initially balks at allowing them to organize such an expensive wedding because they are 'first-timers' (he says he is worried that he will not get a return on his investment). Bittoo quickly thinks on his feet and does *jugaad*: he launches into an impassioned plea in which he reminds his prospective client of how, several decades ago, his father had taken a risk in trusting him to begin his own tyre business. He adds that, now that the client is the 'tyre king' of the country, he should place his trust in first-timers like them. Bittoo's *jugaad* lies in his ability to shrewdly spin a narrative that celebrates the ability to take risks, and it is his spirit of *jugaad* that persuades his prospective client to give Shaadi Mubarak such a lucrative and high-profile deal. In *Band Baaja Baaraat*, the new protagonists of enterprise culture do not believe in following the path taken by their parents (see also Mankekar 2011). For these individuals *jugaad*, rather than educational qualifications, is a key component of the new enterprise culture and, hence, of the road map to growth, success, and progress.

Even though the term *jugaad* has become ubiquitous in popular parlance and the transnational discourses of management experts, it is by no means new and, in fact, may be etymologically traced to the locally made motor vehicles that were (and still are) used in small villages in north India to provide inexpensive transportation.[12] In these contexts, *jugaad* refers to the ability to improvise a solution that can enable one to make do with scarce resources. In the current context of global capitalism, *jugaad* has come to refer to improvisation and innovation, managing with whatever resources are available, and getting the job done within the constraints that one is confronted with.

This emphasis on entrepreneurship in terms of individual responsibility and risk-taking is concomitant with the reshaping of some sectors of the Indian economy by neoliberal capitalism. In this regard, Shruti and Bittoo embody the neoliberal ethic of self-regulation and self-production as aspirational subjects who depend on *jugaad* to get ahead and attain their goals.[13] It is crucial to note that the new enterprise culture, which encapsulates neoliberal discourses of risk, success, and individual responsibility, draws upon older versions and is hence neither unique nor unprecedented; rather, it has been reconfigured in the face of transnational circuits of capital and desire. Yet, in many contemporary management discourses, *jugaad* is being touted as the basis for the progress of the New India, particularly in the wake of global recession.

In some of these discourses, *jugaad* is portrayed as intrinsic to Indian culture, thus reinforcing essentialist conceptions of culture and capitalism.[14] Essentialist

theories about the relationship between culture and capitalism have a long and entrenched genealogy in scholarly and popular commentaries. Sylvia Yanagisako critiques cultural essentialist theories of capitalism in which 'non-Western culture' is viewed as either an impediment to modern capitalism or the basis for a 'different species of capitalism' (2002: 22). In many of these frameworks, she argues, 'Asian capitalism' is represented as exemplary of 'non-Western capitalism' such that it becomes 'the marked category that carries culture, while "Western capitalism" is the unmarked category – the normal, rational, logical capitalism' (ibid.).[15] In a similar vein, by asserting that *jugaad* is intrinsic to 'Indian culture' or is unique to 'Indian capitalism', these discourses construct essentialist frameworks for understanding 'Indian culture' as well as 'Indian capitalism' such that both are rendered monolithic, static, and ahistoric. Equally problematically, these frameworks are embedded in, and reinforce, place-bound and nationalist assumptions about India and capitalism (Gupta and Ferguson 1992).

Romancing enterprise culture

Let us not forget that *Band Baaja Baaraat*, like all Bollywood films, is itself in the business of making money, and money it certainly made for the producers, Yashraj Films. This film was an enormous box-office success.[16] While its catchy songs and the chemistry of the lead actors played an important role in its popularity, the film's success also drew on its deft packaging of humour, a feel-good endorsement of neoliberal notions of enterprise culture, and, last but not least, its portrayal of the romantic relationship between the hero and heroine. The film is, in the end, a romantic comedy and some of its uniqueness lies in the message with which it ends: not that love conquers all, but that love can co-exist with enterprise culture and, in fact, is co-implicated with it.

Band Baaja Baaraat gives us an opportunity to reflect on the relationship between desire, sentiment, and capitalism. As Shruti and Bittoo begin to work with each other, they rely on each other's ability to engage in *jugaad*: every time they do *jugaad* to rise to a challenge, we see their admiration and affection for each other deepen. Aspiration and *jugaad* are powerful structures of feeling which not only undergird their ability to participate in enterprise culture but, equally importantly, become foundational to their love for each other.

As noted above, when they first meet, Shruti is adamant that love and business are incompatible. Given that their business is about celebrating love (or, at the very least, marriage), this statement might seem ironic. They are initially successful in adhering to this principle, which, Shruti insists, is the cornerstone of not just her business plans but, also, her personal life: she asserts that she has no time for 'emotional complications' (this English phrase is used by Shruti in the film). However, the two are romantically attracted to each other, become close friends, and end up having sex. When Shruti begins to fall in love with Bittoo, he withdraws, and the resulting antagonism leads to a break-up of their partnership. They are compelled to reunite when a wealthy client offers them a

major deal on condition that they work together. The two of them collaborate on this project, come to depend on each other's *jugaad* to get them out of many difficult situations, and become close again. Their wedding at the end of the film brings the motif of wedding planning to its logical conclusion: just as love and capital converge in the production of a wedding as the ultimate commodity, their relationship is forged through the marriage between desire and capital.

My analysis of the co-implication of capital (in this case, enterprise capitalism) and romance is in dialogue with a vast literature, which interrogates the relationship between capitalism and domains that we might relegate to the realm of the private and the subjective: for instance, conceptions of romantic love. As social theorists like Anthony Giddens have long argued, the emergence of romantic love as the normative basis for sexual intimacy and domestic partnership needs to be viewed in relation to broader socio-historical developments pertaining to the recasting of public and private spheres in terms of the economic and the domestic (1992).[17] Furthermore, in her analysis of the sentiments that undergird capitalist production in Italian family firms, Yanagisako draws on Michelle Rosaldo's 1984 critique of the presumed binary between reason and emotion and argues that the role of emotion in shaping economic action has been neglected (2002). Examining the relationship between sentiments and economic action, she critiques the Parsonian binary of instrumental reason versus affect as a framework for understanding social action, whereby family and religion are governed by affect while the economy is governed by instrumental action (ibid.: 9). Additionally, she argues that 'the distrust of emotion as a force shaping economic action in all but the most affective ("female") spheres of social life evidences a model of human subjectivity and social action that has deep roots in Western European cosmology' (ibid.: 9–10). Yanagisako uses the term 'sentiment' to 'bridge the dichotomy between emotion and thought. As affective ideas and ideas with affect, sentiments are both emotional orientations and embodied dispositions.… Under particular conditions, sentiments generate particular desires and incite particular social actions' (ibid.: 10).

Band Baaja Baaraat provokes us to interpret the relationship between neoliberal capitalism, as exemplified in certain forms of enterprise culture, and romantic love, to examine 'the intimacies of global capitalism' (Wilson 2004: 195). By the end of the film Shruti and Bittoo learn that love and business are symbiotic. This, then, is the ultimate triumph of enterprise culture: as wedding planners, not only are they in the business of transforming weddings into business projects, but their own relationship is founded on the inextricability of love and business. Let me be clear: I am not suggesting that neoliberal forms of enterprise culture have obliterated all other forms of romantic love, or that aspiration and *jugaad* are now the only basis of romantic love. In her landmark volume on the cultural history of love in South Asia, Orsini suggests that contemporary manifestations of romantic love co-exist with and 'revitalize' earlier expressions of love (2006: 39). In the same vein, I want to insist that romantic love as co-imbricated with enterprise culture does not replace other forms of love. Rather, my objective has been to demonstrate how *Band Baaja Baaraat* mobilizes romantic love, as a

historically specific structure of feeling, to render normative values, norms, and subjectivities central to enterprise culture.

Thus, as much as it is a contribution to an understanding of enterprise culture in contemporary India, my analysis of *Band Baaja Baaraat* is also an engagement with prevalent analyses of the feelings and intimacies surrounding, engendered by, and reshaped by capitalism in specific socio-historical conjunctures (Berlant 2000; Giddens 1992; Rofel 2007; Wilson 2004; Yanagisako 2002). I have been interested in the role of popular media, in this instance a popular Hindi film, in the production and circulation of structures of feeling that make certain actions normative or, at the very least, aspirational. In their celebration, indeed their romanticization, of enterprise culture, films like *Band Baaja Baaraat* resonate with and articulate particular structures of feeling that have become central components of emergent enterprise cultures in contemporary India.

Business, love, and neoliberalism

My analysis of *Band Baaja Baarat*'s production of some of the structures of feeling that have congealed around neoliberal capitalism also intervenes in debates about the mutations of neoliberalism in particular locations in the global economy. Scholars have long warned us against conceiving of capitalism as monolithic or as 'penetrating' certain societies from the outside (Gibson-Graham 2006; Yanagisako 2002); similarly, the theoretical and political traps inherent in conceptualizing neoliberalism as singular in its forms and monolithic in its effects cannot be underestimated. As represented in *Band Baaja Baaraat*, notions of self-sufficiency, risk-taking, and *jugaad* seem to have been *re*constituted in the wake of the liberalization of the Indian economy such that contemporary forms of enterprise culture both share and diverge from hegemonic discourses of neoliberalism.

Nikolas Rose has pointed out that the ethical dimensions of neoliberalism are predicated on the individual's normative capacity to govern the self (1996). The power of these normative discourses lies in the fact that they marginalize those whose 'choices' and trajectories do not subscribe to their ethical and affective regimes. As several scholars have asserted, neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic policies but is a form of governmentality that produces particular kinds of subject; for instance, Ong describes the moral calculus of neoliberalism as 'normative techniques in self-care for attaining a particular mode of being' (Ong 2006: 21, 22; see also, Brown 2003; Sharma and Gupta 2006). *Band Baaja Baaraat* depicts enterprise culture as not only normal but normative: as an ethic, a set of rules and guidelines that governs the choices that young people should make, and an ontological state of being in the world.

Yet I have also asserted that enterprise culture is not new to either India or to New Delhi, where *Band Baaja Baaraat* is set. Undoubtedly, heterogeneous and historically sedimented forms of enterprise culture exist in different parts of India. Certainly, New Delhi is a city which, in addition to being the political

capital and the centre of the Indian bureaucracy, has been home to different forms of enterprise culture since at least 1947, when refugees from West Punjab and Sindh began to make new lives for themselves by launching small businesses: indeed, urban lore in New Delhi is full of legends and oral histories about the salience of enterprise culture to the post-Partition rehabilitation of communities and families.[18] So what is so different about contemporary forms of enterprise culture? While a detailed response to this question is beyond the scope of this article, there is no doubt that, for one, after the liberalization of the economy, the Indian state is now explicitly encouraging citizens to take charge of their own destinies (Sharma and Gupta 2006; Sharma 2008). In these discursive contexts, the enterprising citizen is quickly becoming the model citizen, and enterprise culture is emerging as a hegemonic pathway to growth and success. Second, the enterprise culture valorized in *Band Baaja Baaraat* has been generated by the emergence of affective labour in the service sector of the Indian economy (Hardt 1999). Unlike the emphasis on manufacturing or retail in post-Partition discourses of enterprise culture, post-liberalization enterprise culture is yoked to consumption. As with Shruti and Bittoo's efforts to manage (and incite) the consumption practices of others, this form of enterprise culture is frequently about providing services to others to enable their consumption. Third, in contemporary representations of enterprise culture, growth and success are measured largely in aspirational terms. Indeed, class and social mobility are now represented in aspirational terms, rather than in what people actually achieve. In these representations, success is no longer measured in terms of job security (exemplified in the government jobs so desired by previous generations): the precariousness of jobs, and of enterprise in particular, is accepted as par for the course.

Further, in a context where social mobility is conflated with the aspiration to succeed, brash self-confidence is depicted as a hallmark, if not a requirement, of success and growth for the entrants into the new economy (for example, Radjou *et al.* [2012] consistently represent *jugaad* as a 'gutsy' mindset). The assumption is that, regardless of one's class background, a combination of aspiration, self-confidence, and *jugaad* will enable one to succeed in one's objectives. These representations stress that lower-middle-class youth need not be sophisticated in order to enjoy the same commodities as the upper classes. In media representations like *Band Baaja Baaraat* and the VTV advertisements with which I began this chapter, lower-middle-class youth are unapologetic about their imperfect English and the exclusion from elite education that it signals. In fact, such representations claim that these young entrepreneurs *need* to be able to say 'We are like this only' in order to engage in *jugaad*, improvise, and be pragmatic: this brash self-confidence enables them to take risks and think outside the box in defiance of conventional pathways to upward mobility and success. It is not enough to work hard in order to forge ahead; traditional measures of cultural capital like education have been replaced by the capacity for *jugaad*: the ability to come up with a fix in the face of scarce resources by skirting convention, defying received ideas, and getting the job done. It is no surprise that, in *Band Baaja Baaraat*, enterprise culture is about having fun while one makes money

('mauj', to quote Bittoo): fusing success, growth, and fun, these representations stress that hard work, risk-taking, and *jugaad* are fun in and of themselves. At the same time, in tracking the ways in which capitalism has reshaped realms of intimate life, we need also to be wary of assuming the singularity of capitalism or ascribing to it a totalizing power over every dimension of social life. Drawing on Wilson's work on market economies in Bangkok (2004: 11–20), I suggest that a plurality of economic systems exists in contemporary India, including kin, folk, and other moral economies, not all of which might be governed by the instrumental rationality of neoliberal capitalism.

My objective in this chapter has been to analyse how popular media, exemplified by *Band Baaja Baaraat*, produce and circulate structures of feeling that are consonant with neoliberal renditions of enterprise culture salient in India after economic liberalization. In *Band Baaja Baaraat*, the means of production are the aspirations of the young entrepreneurs: as I have noted above, the aspirations of Shruti and Bittoo are affective because they are generative of their agency, and shape their capacities to act and be acted upon. And it is these aspirations, to make money and to achieve success, that bring Shruti and Bittoo together in the first place. These aspirations and the *jugaad* that they engage to pursue their goals are the basis of their professional relationship, their friendship and, eventually, their love for each other.

I began by pointing to how the tagline for VTV, 'We Are Like This Only', emblematized the brash self-confidence of a new demographic, which was later to be seized upon and termed 'the aspirational classes' by those engaged in advertising and marketing. If the term 'aspirational classes' foregrounds the discursive conflation of desire and accomplishment, it also reveals the different ways in which desire is shaped by capital, and how desire and feelings shape capital itself. *Band Baaja Baaraat* takes the marriage of desire and capital to its logical conclusion: the mutual imbrication of love and business, *pyaar* and *vyaapar*. For in the end the film insists that, as evident in the wedding celebrations of Shruti and Bittoo, *pyaar* and *vyaapar*, love and business, far from being incompatible, are intimately entangled.

Acknowledgements

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Filmography

Band Baaja Baaraat (2010) directed by Maneesh Sharma, Yashraj Films.
Bunty aur Babli (2005) directed by Shaad Ali, Yashraj Films.

Dev D. (2009) directed by Anurag Kashyap, Ronnie Screwvala.
Guru (2007) directed by Mani Ratnam, Mani Ratnam and G. Srinivasan.
Kabhie Khushi Kabhie Gham (2001) directed by Karan Johar, Yash Johar.
Oye Lucky! Lucky Oye! (2008) directed by Dibakar Banerjee, Ronnie Screwvala.
Shanghai (2012) directed by Dibakar Banerjee, PVR Films.

Notes

1 See, for instance, a book by Rama Bijapurkar entitled *We Are Like That Only* (2007) on the importance of the aspirational classes to the entry of multinational corporations into Indian markets and homes.
2 Several scholars have critiqued the reification of 'the' Indian middle class as a monolithic, static, or self-evident sociological entity. Elsewhere, I focus on processes of upward class mobility to assert that 'middle-class' identity is an aspirational positionality that is closely imbricated with discursive practices of consumption, gender, sexuality, and nationalism (1999). Fernandes critiques the over-emphasis on consumption in analyses of class formation (2006), while Mazzarella has pointed to 'the middle class' as a discursive formation (2005: 3). Mazzarella reminds us that 'the figure of the Indian middle classes – whatever its sociological reality – has become one of the main idioms through which a series of contemporary concerns are brought into critical juxtaposition: the rise of Hindu nationalism, consumerist liberalization, and the pluralization/fragmentation of national politics' (2005: 1).
3 Since a detailed analysis of Indian youth is not within my realm of expertise, I defer to the work of scholars such as Jeffrey *et al.* (2007) and Lukose (2009).
4 I draw, of course, on Althusser's conception of interpellation (1971). See also, Hall (1985).
5 In *How to Do Things with Words* (1975), Austin asserts that certain kinds of sentence may be evaluated as performative utterances, that is, in terms of the actions that they perform rather than their truth value.
6 As scholars like Jeffery *et al.* (2007) and Lukose (2009) have argued, the lived experiences of rural and/or poor youth contrast sharply with their depiction in the media. Representations of youth as leading the way in India's march to 'the future' exist side by side with anxieties about the helplessness or, in some narratives, the self-indulgent apathy of youth. (On the place of children and childhood in nationalist discourses of futurity, see Mankekar 1997.)
7 Compare with Berlant (2000); Boris and Parrenas (2010); Giddens (1992); Hochschild (2012). See also, Wilson (2004) on capitalism and intimacy and Yanagisako (2002) on the centrality of sentiment to economic action.
8 See Allison (2000) and Laplanche and Pontalis (1974) on fantasy in anthropology and in psychoanalytic theory respectively.
9 On the difference between affect and structure of feeling, see Mankekar (2012).
10 From *The Making of Band Baaja Baaraat*, Yashraj Films.
11 See, for example, Radjou *et al.* (2012), available online at: http://asiasociety.org/business/development/can-us-companies-adopt-*jugaad*-mindset, accessed 31 January 2013;. See also http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2013–01–18/news/36415551_1_*jugaad*-indian-mythology-indian-logistics-firm, accessed 10 February 2013.
12 See, for instance, the best-seller *Jugaad Innovation* (2012) by Navi Radjou, Jaideep Prabhu, and Simone Ahuja.
13 Compare Grewal (2005) on the centrality of self-production and self-regulation in neoliberal subject formation.
14 See, for instance, 'India's Indigenous Genius', by Devita Sarkar in the *Wall Street Journal*, available online at: http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124745880685131765.

html, accessed 25 August 2011; 'India's Next Global Export: Innovation', by Reena Jana in *Bloomberg Businessweek*, available online at: www.businessweek.com/innovate/content/dec2009/id2009121_864965.htm, accessed 25 August 2011.

15 Compare Greenhalgh (1994) and Ong (1999) for critiques of essentialist theories of the relationship between culture and capitalism.

16 Although exact figures are impossible to ascertain, the film is reported to have earned total revenues of Rs.23 crores (approximately $4.5 million). Produced with a budget of Rs.10 crores (approximately $2 million), this film generated a 53 per cent return on its investment (see www.boxofficeindia.com/boxnewsdetail.php?page=shownews&articleid=2409&nCat=box_office_news, accessed 29 January 2013).

17 For feminist critiques of the public and private binary, see Collier and Yanagisako (1987); on its implications in colonial India, see Chatterjee (1993). See Orsini (2006) for historical, literary, and ethnographic analyses of 'love' in pre-colonial, early-modern, and contemporary South Asia. On the relationship between romantic love, duty towards the family, and post-liberalization practices of consumption, see Dwyer (2000).

18 It goes without saying that there were many forms of enterprise culture that flourished in New Delhi prior to the Partition of India in 1947. A nuanced analysis of the continuities and shifts between pre- and post-Partition forms of enterprise culture is an important topic of study; regrettably, this is not a project that I can undertake here.

2 Fantasies of transformation

Education, neoliberal self-making, and Bollywood

Paromita Chakravarti

Neoliberalizing education: forging new selves

The liberalization of the Indian economy has led to major shifts in education policy in the last decade, manifested through the growing deregulation, privatization, and commercialization of the education sector and the involvement of private multinational companies in it. This has facilitated the commodification of knowledge and the technologization of pedagogy, and has underlined the need for innovation and competitiveness in the global market, often at the expense of equity, diversity, and inclusiveness (Sharma 2005, 2010; Qamar 2011).

Much of the success of the neoliberal project seems to rest on India's ability to become a 'knowledge economy', a term popularized by Peter Drucker and now used widely in the Indian state's education-policy statements, which refer to a regime of 'knowledge management and marketability very different from the academic goals of learning, understanding and disciplinary skills' (Chaudhuri 2011a: 7). As India enters the global economy, there is a growing need for English-educated, technically trained personnel for its expanding IT and IT-enabled service industries. The National Knowledge Commission Report (Government of India 2006–2009, hereafter NKC) has stressed the need to gear Indian education policies towards making India a 'knowledge economy', with a focus on creating IT proficiency, efficiency, innovation, enterprise, and excellence – all of which, it suggests, can be more effectively delivered by the market, rather than by a bureaucracy-ridden, corrupt, inefficient government system. It recommends the Private Public Partnership (PPP) model for developing not only tertiary education but also school education.[1] Although private schools and colleges have always existed in India, privatization has never received state endorsement on the scale and intensity that we now observe.

Investment in education has increased manifold, as it is being seen as a driver of the new economy, giving the nation a competitive advantage in the global market by promoting technological innovation and supplying trained personnel for business and industry.[2] With deregulation, the education sector itself is also emerging as big business, with a combined market size of 450 million students and $50 billion per annum, with projected growth rates of 10–15 per cent over the next decade. The opportunities are immense, given the willingness of the

Indian middle class to pay for education; the huge mismatch between demand and supply; and the fragmented nature of the sector, which has only a few large players (Ramanathan 2011).

The large-scale privatization of education signals a change in the Indian state as it moves from its interventionist, protectionist, and welfarist roles to a more regulatory function, facilitating the entry of the market. This necessitates not only socio-cultural and ideological restructuring, but also reorientation of citizen subjectivities. As a market ethic comes to dominate not only business but all spheres of activity, educational ideals are readjusted. Once considered a state responsibility, a merit good that should be inclusive, morally, and socially transformative and directed towards building citizens and the nation for the future, education is now primarily an arena of individual achievement and economic success (Peters 2001). The new 'technologies of governance' require individuals to be self-reliant, self-regulating, and above all, enterprising, capable of managing their lives without state support (Burchell 1993; Rose 1992; O'Malley 1996; Rose and Miller 2008). The 'Life Skills' training module introduced in Indian schools in 2006 was much more than an HIV-awareness programme. It sought to equip adolescents with coping strategies for a rapidly changing world in which they would have to be innovative, show initiative, and assume greater responsibility for themselves. The emergence of education as a significant site of neoliberal self-making is recognized and reflected by the Indian media. Through an analysis of mainstream films based on the theme of education, this chapter will argue that Bollywood is helping to forge the new idiom and ideals of a private education system, which will foster goal-directed learning, competitiveness, and entrepreneurship.

New reforms and the media

After a long period of policy vacuum in education, there is now a flurry of reforms and legislation through which the government is trying to effect a paradigm shift in the system – yet these piecemeal changes lack any comprehensive framework or consistent vision (Tilak 2010). A market-driven private education system sits uneasily with the realities of Indian poverty and democracy: the need to make education a universal right, ensuring that even the poorest child enrolls, remains in, and finishes school. There are demands to improve the infrastructure of state schools, provide midday meals, achieve gender equity, and ensure democratic classrooms where disabled, poor, or 'low-caste' children will find a supportive environment. As the government struggles to meet goals of increasing literacy, providing universal access, and reducing drop-outs, it must also square these goals with the needs of the market, corporate players, and a neoliberal economy. Although the passage of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act 2009 (hereafter RTE) implied the recognition of education as a public good, the idea was challenged by pro-reform economists who support privatization, particularly in higher education: 'national policy resembles a game of *kabbadi*, with ground being alternately lost and won by public education

initiatives on the one side, and pro-privatization groups on the other' (Chaudhuri 2011a).

The government seeks to gloss over many of these policy inconsistencies through a carefully crafted rhetoric, a double-speak full of strategic silences and erasures. Critics have pointed out how the 'Third Way' politics in Blairite Britain sought to steer a way between Right and Left ideologies by using media 'spin'. The policies of New Labour would thus be double-coded by the media as both business-friendly and socially acceptable to both Conservative and Labour supporters. This 'mediatization' does not only manipulate the public reception of policy: it influences the content too, through a nexus between corporate media interests and the government (Gewirtz *et al.* 2004). We are now seeing manifestations of such a mediatization of policy in India. Although major reforms and legislative changes in the field of education are under way, there is little public debate on these issues, which have become almost the sole property of media spin (John and Nair 2011; Sharma 2010: 97, 122). The most intensive discussions on educational reforms were conducted by the Human Resources Minister, Kapil Sibal, on various private television channels. Many of these programmes were supported by private companies, which worked closely with the media to promote the new educational policies that promised significant gains to business.

Corporates not only realize the potential of the opening up of the education sector, they also understand the need for a trained workforce and an educated middle-class consumer base for future markets. As Aviva's slogan proclaims: 'Education is the best insurance.' Education for All campaigns supporting RTE, were launched by multinationals such as Aviva, Canon, Coca Cola, and Procter and Gamble, with endorsements from Bollywood stars. Some of these companies set up private–public partnerships with the government to build the numerous new schools required for the implementation of RTE. Workshops with stakeholders to disseminate RTE were conducted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) on behalf of the government. Education, hitherto neglected by the government, has acquired a new glamour and become the focus of the discourse of liberalization. It is also central to a new mediascape in which common corporate sponsorships, branding, and shared markets and audiences have blurred differences between campaigns, advertisements, television shows, radio programmes, and films, all of which target the same section of middle-class consumer-citizens. Some of the companies that promote education campaigns also build schools, provide branding for Bollywood films or television serials on related issues, and invite stars to endorse universal schooling in promotional campaigns.

Indian cities are covered in advertisements for private schools, colleges, universities, and coaching centres offering air-conditioned classrooms, heated pools, riding lessons, and careers in top-ranking companies. They promise to prepare students for the globalized world, which demands multiple competences, competitiveness, innovation, flexibility, self-reliance, and – crucially – success. The dream of a child fully equipped for the new economic order cannot be sold easily through painstaking parliamentary debates and public

discussions. The government is increasingly relying on the power of private media: television, advertisements, corporate campaigns, and, significantly, Bollywood films to build a public (largely middle-class) consensus for its educational reforms. The popular Hindi film industry is selling the fantasy of creating new global citizens who will adapt to the changed world despite poverty and deprivation. Education appears as a site of transformation in a spate of recent Hindi films, including *Taare Zameen Par* (henceforth *TZP*), *F.A.L.T.U.*, *Admissions Open*, *Udaan*, *Stanley Ka Dabba*, *Paathshaalaa*, *3 Idiots*, *Aarakshan*, and several others. In the absence of engaged public debate, these films are generating a context within which the systemic and ideological readjustments required by the changing economy and polity can be imagined and elaborated. Films like *F.A.L.T.U.* and *Admissions Open* are directly inspired by a global paradigm emerging through Hollywood stories of neoliberal self-making. But the settings, themes, and resolutions of these Hindi films have local resonances as they work with the tried Bollywood formulas, which complicate the narrative of neoliberalization even as they manufacture consent for it.

The fantasy element in Hindi popular cinema helps to gloss over questions about the suitability of market-led educational reforms for a poor country like India, riven by caste and class divides that are likely to deepen through these changes. Bollywood films such as those named above blur the divide between the demand for an inclusive education focusing on local knowledge, vernacular languages, and a non-competitive school environment on the one hand, and, on the other hand, an emerging neoliberal mantra of enterprise, competition, and success marked by English-language competence, technological expertise, and global access. The Indian state is increasingly enlisting the services of Bollywood to persuade the multiplex-going middle-class audience of the need for these shifts in thinking. This signals a new role for Hindi cinema, as well as a new relationship in the middle-class mind between popular films and children's education.

Bollywood, education and the nation-state

Popular Hindi cinema has traditionally been a vehicle for nationalist ideology, projecting the concerns of the Indian state and receiving its support. In post-independence India, films like *Awaara* (1951), *Shri 420* (1956), *Naya Daur* (1957), *Pyaasa* (1957), *Mother India* (1957), *Phir Subah Hogi* (1958), and others articulated the Nehruvian state's struggles with poverty, injustice, and communalism. Actors like Dilip Kumar, Raj Kapoor (in *Awara*), and Nargis (in *Mother India*) became icons of the new nation and represented it at home and abroad (Rajadhyaksha 1993; Chakravarty 1993; Madhava Prasad 1998; Chatterjee 2003; Desai 2004).[3]

From the 1960s (following the international success of Satyajit Ray's films), a divide developed between state-supported serious, realist cinema with a limited middle-class following and commercial, popular cinema with stars and songs,

which the audiences of the former kind dismissed as vulgar. In the 1970s, rather than projecting the aspirations of Nehruvian welfarism, popular Hindi films were expressing their frustration with a failing polity through the 'angry young man', iconized by Amitabh Bachchan (Mukherjee 2002). But the state, albeit a flawed one, remained very much in focus as an object of critique. However, in the 1990s, the globalization of Bollywood cinema marked its move towards diasporic markets, its reliance on multinational corporate sponsorship, and a thematic focus on the private sphere of the joint family as a site for the nostalgic celebration of Indianness in foreign climes. The spate of gangster movies, also a feature of the 1990s, depicted a crumbling public sphere, a failed state, and corrupt police force. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the state has virtually disappeared from Hindi movies. The Bollywood film has now become a medium of the market with tacit, sometimes active, state support. The shift from single-cinema theatres to expensive multiplexes located in prestigious shopping malls indicates changes in audience composition and viewing practices. A large section of Hindi films no longer caters to the masses but addresses the upwardly mobile middle classes who frequent these urban spaces. It is this 'neo-middleclass' (Mukherjee 2009), the consumer-citizens who enable, sustain, and benefit from liberalization, who are the audiences of the films under discussion, as well as the users of the private education system introduced by the reforms.

Traditionally, popular Hindi cinema and education were antithetically related in the Indian middle-class psyche. The film industry represented a corrupting influence on children, not only for its illicit pleasures, but also for promoting the fantasy of unearned success and instant glamour, which rendered education redundant. However, now the industry and its image have changed dramatically. Bollywood has been corporatized and professionalized and is now the most recognizable face of the global brand of India (Rajadhyaksha 2003). It is thus unsurprising that an advertisement for a highly reputed private school promises to 'make your child a Katrina Kaif'.[4] Educational goals are no longer related to academic success but geared instead towards notions of enterprise and achievement symbolized by Kaif, a British Indian non-Hindi-speaking industry outsider who has acquired Bollywood stardom.[5]

The new entente between Bollywood and Indian education is embodied most spectacularly in Aamir Khan, star-actor and producer of popular but socially relevant films like *Lagaan*, *Rang De Basanti*, *TZP*, and *3 Idiots*, which celebrate the triumph of individual enterprise against corrupt, unjust, or apathetic administrative or political systems. The popularity of *TZP*, a film about how a dyslexic child dismissed as a failure finds success when encouraged by a dedicated teacher, and *3 Idiots*, a coming-of-age story of three friends in an engineering college who rebel against the competitive and rigid academic system to choose unconventional lives, established Khan as a spokesperson of enlightened educational values. He was chosen to lead the widely televised debate on Indian education with the US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, when she visited India. Khan was the official voice of the Maharashtra government's education

campaigns. In 2010 he received one of the highest national awards, the Padma Bhushan, partly for his services to Indian education (Raghavendra 2010).

Khan's *3 Idiots* (Rajkumar Hirani 2009) and *TZP* were screened for school children and teachers as well as for government dignitaries and ministers. Both films used the resources of the Bollywood genre, its improbable solutions, convenient erasures and silences, and heartwarming closures to provide a gentle critique of the education system without implicating either the state or the market. The problems of unequal access to schools experienced by poor and differently abled students are glossed over in a celebration of individual initiative against all odds. The enterprising poor child who completes his education against all social impediments is emerging as the new protagonist of a spate of Hindi films.

The poor student as hero

In *3 Idiots*, a poor doorman's son, Rancho, graduates from a highly competitive engineering institution – only to gift his degree to his father's employer's son. This is done to honour a contract between Rancho's father and his employer according to which the highly talented Rancho would receive the privileges of higher education only if he agreed to appear in all examinations for the employer's son (a weak student), secure a degree on his behalf, and then disappear without a trace. Having renounced his degree, Rancho sets up a school and pursues path-breaking scientific research in a remote Ladakh village in the north Indian hills. Although Khan's film critiques the race for degrees and worldly success which kills dreams, creativity, and young students, the hero must be endorsed by the very system that he rejects: he comes first in his college examinations, and his discoveries receive patents from American institutions. In *TZP* too, although competitiveness is condemned, the dyslexic boy must win a painting contest in order to be vindicated. His claim for empathy rests on his individual talent rather than on the need for systemic equity or justice. Khan's *3 Idiots* suggests that the poorest boy can, through merit and enterprise, succeed in an unequal world, aided by chance and feudal relationships, which enable Rancho to seal an unfair deal, his passport to higher education.

In Amole Gupte's quirky *Stanley Ka Dabba* (Stanley's Tiffin Box 2011), the eponymous child protagonist, an orphan, works in a cheap restaurant. However, he studies in an up-market missionary school. Too poor to afford his own lunch, he eats with his friends at school. A greedy teacher, a Dickensian character, who poaches on the boys' lunchboxes, humiliates Stanley for not bringing his own food. Stanley stops attending school. However, a friend at the restaurant packs leftovers in a lunchbox and sends Stanley back to school. The restaurant food becomes an instant success, and Stanley is welcomed back in class. The film celebrates the cheerfulness, humour, and enterprise with which Stanley overcomes grinding poverty. Glossing over how he manages to find a place in an expensive school, the narrative does not present his social situation as an impediment (except his inability to bring tasty 'tiffin') to his access to high-quality education. The support of affluent friends and Stanley's own initiative negate the effects of social inequalities.

Although the film claims that it was shot only over weekends and that none of the child actors missed a day of school, the narrative appears to normalize child labour as an aspect of a poor boy's life, particularly if he wants a good education. Despite a legal ban on child labour,[6] it seems almost natural for Stanley to work at the restaurant to support his schooling. RTE 2009 promises free and compulsory education to all children up to the age of 14. But in the absence of any political will to implement the law, it is the enterprising, labouring poor child who will have to support his own education, in private schools, relying largely on his friends' help. Perhaps poor children's right to education can be realized only by forgoing their right to be free of labour.[7]

The internationally acclaimed *I am Kalam* (Nila Madhab Panda 2011) depicts a poor boy's struggle to transform his life. A waiter in a *dhaba* (roadside eating joint), Chotu models himself on India's self-made ex-President, Kalam, who worked as a newspaper boy to put himself through school. He adopts Kalam's name and his motto: 'There is no destiny, everything depends on our work. People can transform their lives through their actions.' Chotu reads between shifts and learns geography and French by conversing with tourists visiting the *dhaba*. He befriends a prince, whose palace, converted into a heritage hotel, stands next to the *dhaba*. The prince and Chotu trade skills: the prince teaches Chotu English and horse riding and in exchange receives lessons in Hindi and tree climbing. Chotu also imparts political lessons on the Indian republic to the prince: 'K is not for King, but K is for Kalam'. The prince gives him a spare school uniform, which Chotu cherishes as a precious possession. The intensity of Chotu's desire to attend school is matched by the love of his colleague Laptan for Bollywood. Both boys seek to transform their lives, and the power of education proves to be more effective than that of films. But this linking of the two focuses on their deeper connections in our times.

In a Hindi essay that Chotu writes for the prince, he describes his aspirations for a better life. The prince wins an elocution contest by reciting Chotu's moving composition. This appropriation of Chotu's creativity echoes the arrogation of Rancho's academic achievements by his employer's son. Both suggest a social-educational model whereby the poor must prove their usefulness to the rich in order to gain access to their institutions of learning. Despite his determination to break social barriers, Chotu can only dream of a school established by the prince's bounty for poor boys like him. The prince's gift of the school uniform to Chotu symbolizes a paradigm of feudal patronage and charity, rather than one of people's entitlement or right to education. It is the uniform that later leads the rajah, the prince's father, to suspect Chotu, mistakenly, of theft and to humiliate him. However, the most disturbing final image of the film is when the rajah, recognizing Chotu's talent, offers to support his schooling and Chotu replies that he would rather pay for his own education by working. In these films, the image of the labouring and self-reliant child has been normalized as an acceptable way of accommodating the meritorious poor in schools for the rich. This sits uneasily with the right to education, as well as with the law against child labour.

Despite pervasive poverty, these films focus only on the exceptional 'poor but meritorious' student, as indeed do Indian educational policies (Apple 2001: 417). The National Knowledge Commission fulfils its commitment to equity by recommending scholarships for them (Government of India 2009).[8] They receive subsidies and incentives within a system which remains primarily geared towards the interests of fee-paying students and inaccessible to the poor, who must be exceptionally gifted in order to enter it. The Victorian idea of the 'deserving poor' is seeing a revival. In neoliberal India, poor students become 'deserving' by demonstrating enterprise and talent, which persuades the rich to provide for them, out of either self-interest or charity. Poverty is increasingly seen as an individual disability, which may be overcome with determination, rather than as an endemic socio-political problem requiring global solutions. In recent Bollywood films, the interest in the theme of disability and education (*Black*, *Iqbaal*, *TZP*) has created a paradigm of the challenged but gifted child who succeeds against odds through his chance encounter with an extraordinary teacher. This story is often transposed to the poor child in the films under discussion.

The films celebrate not only the kindness or charity of the rich (*Stanley Ka Dabba*, *I am Kalam*), but also the power of individual enterprise, of both students and teachers. The inspirational teacher appears as hero in *TZP*, *Aarakshan*, *Admissions Open*, *Chak De*, *Mohabbatein*, and *Black*). Although legally guaranteed by the Indian state, universal access to good-quality education has ceased to be a state responsibility and has devolved instead on individuals, groups, corporates, motivated students, and heroic teachers (Apple 2001: 416). The model of Public Private Partnership (PPP) to run educational institutions, recommended by the NKC, indicates such a shift towards partial privatization.[9] The RTE mandates that all private schools should reserve 25 per cent of their seats for poorer students, whose fees would be subsidized or waived.[10] This suggests that the government is relying on the conscience or foresight of the rich to provide for the poor, whether as an act of charity, as an expression of corporate social responsibility, or as a form of investment for the future.

Revisiting reservation and resisting commercialization: the teacher as hero

Higher-education institutions (and government jobs) in India have had quotas (reserved seats) to ensure access to students from marginalized castes (Dalits)[11] and tribes (Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribes). Although quotas were envisaged as a stopgap measure, to be withdrawn when social inequalities decreased, the recommendations of the Mandal Commission (1980) suggested an increase in the percentage of reserved seats and added the category of 'Other Backward Classes' (OBCs). In the early 1990s, attempts to implement these recommendations incited a violent movement by non-quota students who felt that reservations limited their chances to secure academic seats and government jobs. The debate was reopened in 2006, when the 93rd constitutional

amendment sanctified caste-based reservations in private universities, and a new law ensured that reservations for the OBCs should amount to 27 per cent, which led to more protests.[12] In 2008 the Supreme Court upheld the law (Desai and Kulkarni 2008).

Prakash Jha's controversial 2010 film *Aarakshan* (Reservation) unfolds in this context. It questions the caste-based reservation of seats in higher education, suggesting that dedicated teaching, rather than quotas, can ensure that the deserving Dalit gets equal opportunities. The central protagonist, played by Amitabh Bacchhan, a Bollywood icon, is a committed teacher who conducts free tutorial classes at home to help poor boys like Deepak Kumar, a Dalit student, to overcome social impediments in order to to reach the highest standards of global academic excellence.

The film stages a dramatic debate between a privileged upper-caste student, Sushant, who attacks Deepak, alleging that Dalits are un-enterprising and afraid of competing on merit, preferring instead the government's handouts of quota seats. Sushant revisits the arguments made by the proponents of neoliberal educational reforms such as Nandan Nilekani and Sam Pitroda, member and chair of the NKC respectively, who have criticized the reservations policy for compromising the values of excellence and entrepreneurship envisaged by the NKC (Nilekani 2008: 349). In May 2006, Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Andre Béteille, both members of the NKC, resigned in protest at the government's decision to increase quotas, which they regarded as tokenistic gestures unable to address problems of falling quality and low access in higher education. Mehta indicated the need to combine social justice with economic reforms, while Béteille said that the 'competitive advantage in the sphere of knowledge' could not be maintained if the political 'demands of identity politics' had to be catered to.[13]

Although *Aarakshan* tried to explore the complexities of these contradictory claims, it was mostly received as an anti-reservation film and was banned in three Indian states. The director insisted that the film was not anti-quota; besides, reservation was only a backdrop for *Aarakshan*, which was really about the commercialization of education. Prabhakar Anand, the idealistic teacher-hero of the film, helps poor students, regardless of their caste, providing them with free tutorials and other support.[14] His character was inspired by Anand Kumar, who initiated the social and pedagogic experiment of Bihar's 'Super 30'. Since 2003, Kumar has been coaching 30 boys from deprived backgrounds for a year, every year, providing them with free food and lodgings, and preparing them for the prestigious Indian Institute of Technology entrance examinations. Almost all 30 regularly attain IIT entrance. A brilliant mathematician, who supported his education by selling *paapad* (an Indian snack) after relinquishing a Cambridge place because of his poverty, Kumar uses his own life story to inspire his students. His project is an attempt to prove that social inequity and poverty cannot stand in the way of merit.

On screen, Anand's selfless service undermines the business interests of the commercial coaching institutions, which form a parallel education system in India. Nilekani points out that this 'coaching industry [is] worth Rs.10 billion

annually' and feeds off a 'politics of scarcity' (Nilekani 2008: 348).[15] The dearth of good-quality higher-education institutions provokes an intense competition for seats. This is exploited by the coaching schools, which prepare students for entrance examinations of highly reputed colleges for heavily inflated fees. Thus, poor students who cannot afford these courses are disadvantaged. By providing free tutorials, Anand threatens this exploitative system, which is represented by his colleague who runs a private coaching school. In cahoots with the college authorities, the colleague has Anand removed from his college job and his new house – which the colleague then turns into an expensive coaching centre. Determined to maintain his free tutorials, Anand sets up shop opposite his colleague's prestigious establishment and draws away his students, even the rich ones, to his humble classroom. The colleague retaliates by securing a court order for the demolition of Anand's school.

The film moves towards a climax reminiscent of the raw energy and innocence of the 1980s 'angry young man' Bachchan films. Anand stands with his flock of devoted students, a messiah of the poor, as a bulldozer threatens to knock down his establishment and police microphones blare orders at him to move away. In a last-minute reprieve, the enigmatic trustee of Anand's college arrives and reinstates him in his job. This melodramatic resolution borrows the charisma and grandeur of Bacchan's persona to solve the complex problems of Indian education. Caught between a corrupt market (for the rich) and an obstructive state (which undermines enterprise through quotas), the individual teacher must find solutions to differential access or students' diverse capabilities. The apparatus of the Bollywood *masala* movie[16] helps to build up the aura of the larger-than-life teacher and sustain improbable solutions. The neoliberal state also prefers to rely on such fantasies of transformation, rather than addressing realities on the ground.

Like *Aarakshan*, Milind Ukey's *Paathshaalaaa* (School, 2010) critiques the commercialization of education. Opening with shots of newspaper reports on rises in school fees and students' suicides, it launches an attack on globalization and market-led educational reforms which bears shades of the protectionist and moralistic position associated with the Hindu Right (Hansen1996; Corbridge and Harriss 2000; Nayar 2001; Hansen and Jaffrelot 2004). The management of Saraswati Vidya Mandir (suggesting a vernacular Hindu school which evokes the name of a Hindu nationalist school chain) is forced to raise fees to compete with the neighbouring 'Daniel High School' (presumably an English-medium Christian institution), which offers facilities 'like a five-star hotel'. Despite the determined opposition of the Principal (played by Nana Patekar, known for his proximity to Hindu nationalist organizations), the school turns into an exclusive institution for rich students. Media consultants are hired to promote the school, in order to bring in more students and revenues. Students are asked to act in commercials and perform in talent shows to market the school. This affects their studies adversely. When parents protest, the school authorities cite the Supreme Court decision allowing private schools to fix their own fees. The neoliberal state is thus revealed as colluding with the market in promoting reforms.

Finally, teachers and students go on strike, and the Principal decides to quit. He delivers a rousing speech against the commodification of education. Emphasizing the nobility of the teaching profession, he underlines the need to upgrade not facilities but values. Although he is persuaded by his students to stay on, the problem is not resolved. The management suffers only a temporary reversal as a result of the negative publicity given to the students' and teachers' strike. The preservation of the ideals of Indian education in the face of market forces can be achieved only on the level of Bollywood rhetoric. A film which is otherwise alert to the complex relationships between the media, education, and the market ends by pinning its hopes on the charisma of heroic individuals: the dynamic English teacher and the Principal. As the credits roll, the quotation floats up: 'every generation needs a hero … to answer its questions'.

'Following the heart and being free': the logic of privatization

Both *F.A.L.T.U.* (2011) and *Admissions Open* (2010), based on the 2006 Hollywood comedy *Accepted*, suggest fantastic although disturbingly prophetic answers to the questions of Indian education. They rehearse neoliberal arguments about the rigidity, bureaucratization, and corruption of the state system and its dependence on orthodox, rote learning, which thwarts creativity and rewards only those who are ahead in the meaningless marks race. The films narrate the story of a group of students who, rejected by established universities, set up their own fake institution, which is later regularized because of its overwhelming popularity among the large number of 'rejects' who want to join it.

Noting the growing demand for higher education, which cannot be met by the existing government institutions, the NKC has recommended setting up private universities and colleges. These films make a case for privatization and autonomy, suggesting that freedom from state regulation would allow institutions to offer better education, with greater flexibility and choice. In a context in which the poor quality and legally dubious status of many private colleges are coming to light (Chattopadhyay 2009; Tilak 2002),[17] Bollywood uses all its persuasive magic to endorse a university set up by disgruntled students.

In *Admissions Open* (K. D. Satyam, 2010) the hero, Arjun, rejected by all colleges and humiliated by his father, reads an article by the inspiring teacher 'Tariq Sir', who describes education as a stimulant of 'innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship'. This appears to Arjun as an original view, the very antithesis of what he has known so far. But Tariq's plan to create a revolutionary college is rejected by the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the National Accreditation and Assessment Council (NAAC), two government regulatory boards which come in for maximum attack in the film, which portrays the state as obstructive, corrupt, and opposed to reforms.[18] But undeterred, Tariq gathers a group of students rejected by other institutions to set up their own college called 'Spirit', an open-access institution with no criteria for admission except that students should have a dream to follow. Having dispensed with faculty and

examinations, the students design their own courses – an activity which requires little more than scrawling the course name on a board, followed by hands-on training. Thus a course on 'The Art of Corrupt Politics' requires its students to look like thugs and practise intrigue. The college building, laboratories, libraries, and facilities appear as if by magic. Rapid montages of the operations of the new college defy questions of narrative credibility. Funds are never mentioned, except in the context of the growing numbers of students who are eager to pay.[19]

Meanwhile Tariq dies, leaving behind a blueprint for the future, the crucial 'format', which is revealed to be the slogan 'Do what you are born for.' This proves sufficient to keep the college going. The students learn to manage 'Spirit', assisted by a perpetually drunk teacher, another 'reject'. However, he has passion, which in the film is synonymous with enterprise and stands in for (and also generates) quality, finances, and infrastructure. Statements such as 'the education system of India is a joke, because they want grades and not passion' suggest that initiative and drive can replace hard work, academic application, and even merit. As paying consumers of the education system, the students (all affluent) have a sense of entitlement to it. They feel that they can shape it according to their needs. Yet a Rancho or a Chotu, a Deepak Kumar, or a Stanley, however passionate, struggle to find a place and prove themselves within the system, even though it may be flawed, since they are seen as beneficiaries of it.

Autonomous and flexible, 'Spirit' is as free from examinations as it is from violence. When Ashu, a friend of Arjun, who studies in a regular college, is subjected to ragging and bullying, he fails to find justice within the dilatory bureaucratic procedures of his institution and decides to join 'Spirit' instead. But the Principal of Ashu's college, also a member of the evil NAAC committee, issues a show-cause notice to 'Spirit' (a 'show-cause notice' is issued to an individual or organization asking why he/she/it should not be charged with an offence against the law). Portrayed as Bollywood villains, the Principal and his NAAC colleagues challenge the students and the single teacher of 'Spirit' to prove that they fulfil the 'three criteria of a college', namely, 'faculty, facilities, and curriculum'. Although NAAC's slogan is 'Inspiring creativity and passion in students', they fail to appreciate Arjun's impassioned defence of the innovative methods of 'self-learning', following the heart rather than a syllabus, which make both faculty and curriculum redundant. His catalogue of the diverse courses emanating from the students' hearts sound suspiciously like a neoliberal discourse on skill diversification in a saturated market. The rhetoric, however, is of passion: 'Follow your heart or play it safe, get an assured future' (O'Malley 1996). As it becomes increasingly impossible to guarantee an 'assured future' in a liberalizing economy, *Admissions Open* deploys the fiery Bollywood formula of rebellious youth power to argue for what is, in essence, the logic of the market.

In *F.A.L.T.U.* (Remo D'Souza 2011), the business of setting up a college of one's own is less an idealistic project to challenge a flawed education system and more a pragmatic undertaking to deal with upset parents who chastise their children for failing to get college places. Seeking to silence their nagging

parents, a group of 'rejected' students set up a fake university: Fakirchand and Lakirchand Technical University (FALTU). They concoct false letters of acceptance and hire a building to convince their parents that the university actually exists. But hordes of other students, failing to secure places in colleges, hear about FALTU and demand to be admitted. A prank turns into serious business, and Ritesh, the brain behind FALTU, takes charge, fulfilling his dream of becoming an entrepreneur. Like his father, a dealer in used goods, he too starts his business of recycling rejected or *faltu* ('useless' in Hindi) students. In the course of this venture, he and his friends realize the importance of taking responsibility for themselves. Once lazy and pleasure seeking, they become motivated and accountable entrepreneurs, ideal neoliberal subjects. But, as in *Admissions Open*, they also follow their hearts. The mantra is one of free choice, the slogan: 'Make your hobby your profession.'

The students of FALTU design their own courses, with help from international experts who are contacted through technologies of distance learning. A single teacher, appropriately named Google Sir, helps them. FALTU represents a surreal image of the institutions that the NKC recommends as the blueprint for the future. However, this Aristophanic fantasy space is threatened by the machinations of a Bollywood villain, a student's angry father who secures a court order to shut down FALTU on discovering its irregular status. But the enterprising students start a Facebook campaign to save their college. At a college festival, they put on a performance about the plight of students who, rejected by a competitive system, are reduced to committing suicide. The final image of the Indian map reminds us of a nation that has failed to accommodate these 'rejects'. The Human Resource Minister, who is the chief guest at the function, is deeply moved, delivers a stirring speech on the value of true education, and grants recognition to FALTU.

This resolution would be absurd if it did not have shades of reality. The government's rhetoric of promoting student-friendly measures, reducing curricular load, and easing examination pressures, often blinds us to the realities of the market and its inequities: fee hikes, the systematic downgrading of state institutions, and an increasing focus on expensive distance-teaching technologies (like Edusat), which are a means of reducing the agency of (and need for) teachers. As spaces for debate on educational reforms shrink, the government alternates between a democratic discourse of greater choice and freedom and a policy that is implemented without adequate discussion. Bollywood emerges as a site where doubts are quelled and opposition is anaesthetized through narratives that sell dreams. It lends its glamour and star power, its melodramatic world view which divides the world into heroes and villains, and its popular tropes, plots, songs, and fantasies to create a myth of an ideal education system, which is by the students, of the students, and for the students; one which the state will eventually have to recognize. There are no inequities of birth, wealth, ability, or caste that cannot be overcome by the dedicated teacher or inspired student. The unrealistic expectations and ignorance of middle-class parents, the debilitating competitiveness of an outworn system, and the evils of commercialization, can all be

magically combated by individuals without affecting larger structures of power. The theme of education in Bollywood films crystallizes the aspirations of young people, their dreams of social mobility, of self-making, and, most crucially, of success. Even when conventional notions of social or academic success are critiqued, as they are in *TZP*, *3 Idiots*, *Admissions Open*, or *F.A.L.T.U.*, individual, inspired enterprise is the only narrative resolution possible. Paradoxically, the rhetoric of the transformative and emancipatory power of education is mobilized to promote a market-governed notion of institutions, schools, and universities. The state is now increasingly relying on the Bollywood formula and the idea of heroic enterprise to effect ideological leaps and transitions between liberal and neoliberal values, public investment and private profit, and political and economic imperatives in the contested terrain of education. In doing so, the new discourse of enterprise is reshaping educational ideals as well as notions of governance, the role of the state, the consumer-citizen, and the media.

Filmography

3 Idiots (2009) directed by Rajkumar Hirani.
Admissions Open (2010) directed by K. D. Satyam.
Aarakshan (Reservation) (2010) directed by Prakash Jha.
F.A.L.T.U. (2011) directed by Remo D'Souza.
I am Kalam (2011) directed by Nila Madhab Panda.
Paathshaalaaa (School) (2010) directed by Milind Ukey.
Stanley Ka Dabba (Stanley's Tiffin Box) (2011) directed by Amole Gupte.
Taare Zameen Par (2007) directed by Aamir Khan.

Notes

1 The National Knowledge Commission Report 2006–2009 recommends PPP for both schools and higher education (Government of India 2009: 18), legal education (Government of India 2009: 81), and other research and educational institutions.
2 The requirement for qualified manpower for 2012 is 86.6 million, whereas only a quarter of that is actually available in the market, of which only 1.7 million are graduates. See Ramanathan (2011).
3 Also see www.filmreference.com/encyclopedia/Independent-Film-Road-Movies/India-INDIAN-CINEMA-AFTER-INDEPENDENCE, accessed 20 November 2012.
4 Billboard advertisement for South City School, Kolkata. The other names were of David Beckham and Bill Gates.
5 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Katrina_Kaif, accessed 15 September 2012.
6 The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 bans the employment of children under the age of 14 in hazardous industries. The ban has now been expanded to employing them in eateries and homes.
7 The Dalit leader and framer of the Indian constitution B. R. Ambedkar insisted in the Constituent Assembly debates on the right to free and compulsory education for all; that it should apply to all children under 14, and not 11 as was being suggested, since it is at this age that children in India begin to work. See Sadgopal (2010).
8 The NKC Report provides for Dalit school students' scholarships (Government of India 2009: 58), recommends a needs-blind admission policy for higher-education

institutions to be backed up by scholarships for the deserving (Government of India 2009: 63), and recommends scholarships for needy students at undergraduate entry level after evaluating them through a national test (Government of India 2009: 76); it has 100,000 national scholarships for students from rural and backward areas (Government of India 2009: 77).

9 The ambitious number of neighbourhood schools with adequate infrastructure and staff required for the Act to be implemented will require private funds. Businesses are drawn to this project by government subsidies and tax exemptions in this sector.

10 The idea that fee-paying students should subsidize poor students, however ethical, has been challenged in the courts by private schools. In several states, minority-owned private schools and others have been exempted from this clause.

11 The Sanskrit term 'Dalit' literally means 'crushed' and was used by the nineteenth-century social reformer Jyotirao Phule to designate the 'untouchable' castes. See Mendelsohn and Vicziany (1998) and Samaddar (2001).

12 See *Economic and Political Weekly*, Special Issue on reservations in higher education, 41 (24), (2006). Also see Desai and Kulkarni (2008).

13 Andre Beteille's and Pratap Bhanu Mehta's letters of resignation from the National Knowledge Commission are available from 'India Together' website: www.indiatogether.org/2006/may/opi-nkcresign.htm, accessed 14th July, 2013.

14 The economic argument, reiterated by the Supreme Court in its judgement, makes the point that quotas should not apply to rich Dalits or the 'creamy layer'. Many argue further that the quotas should apply to poor non-Dalits too.

15 The ratio of applicants to available seats in the elite state engineering colleges, the nine IITs of India, was 55:1 (Bagchi 2010: 9). The KPMG (the global professional services firm) report says that 17 per cent of the education market is occupied by coaching institutes. The market was about US$0.3 billion in 2008 and was expected to expand to US$0.6 billion in 2012 (Ramanathan 2011).

16 Literally, 'spice'. Used to describe Bollywood movies which use the styles of many genres.

17 See www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?277221 www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_too-many-pvt-colleges-affecting-quality-of-education-jayant-patil_1737170, accessed 21 November 2012. See also www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/education/article3679029.ece www.telegraphindia.com/1090625/jsp/careergraph/story_11152737.jsp, accessed 5 December 2012.

18 Interestingly, criticizing the existing 'over-regulated and under-governed' educational system, the National Knowledge Commission has suggested that UGC's role should be limited to disbursing funds, and that accreditation should be handed over to independent agencies. The Yashpal Committee's report of 2010 recommends that universities should be autonomous and proposes the abolition of the UGC. See John and Nair (2011) and Chaudhuri (2011b).

19 Vijender Sharma describes the privatized system thus: 'students are consumers, teachers are service providers and expert speakers and the institutions or companies catering to education services are organizers' (Sharma 2010: 1).

3 Creating enterprising subjects through skill development

The network state, network enterprises, and youth aspirations in India

Divya Nambiar

In his Independence Day address to the nation on 15 August 2006, India's Prime Minister, Dr Manmohan Singh, emphasized the need to provide India's youth with skills training:

> We will need to ensure far greater availability of educational opportunities at the higher education levels so that we have not just a literate youth but a skilled youth, with skills which can fetch them gainful employment. As our economy booms and as our industry grows, I hear a pressing complaint about an imminent shortage of skilled employees. As a country endowed with huge human resources, we cannot let this be a constraint.[1]

The speech – which presaged a range of major government-backed skills initiatives, all of them launched within a few years of Dr Singh's address – reflected the seriousness with which the Indian state views skills training, particularly in the context of India's enormous youth demographic. These initiatives, ambitiously aiming to train 500 million young Indians over the next decade, have become a major development priority for the country (Planning Commission of India 2008).

The values of enterprise culture, which include individual initiative, risk-taking, and being entrepreneurial (Heelas and Morris 1992; Rose 1992), lie at the core of India's skill-development programmes and drive its implementation. These values are typically associated with the private sector. This chapter demonstrates how the Indian state has emerged as a major actor in promoting these values by funding skill-development projects. The chapter also examines how such initiatives have reconfigured the relationship between the state and the private sector, creating new forms of engagement between these two actors, who are now partners in delivering skills training to India's youth.

The centrality of skills training and the promotion of enterprise culture in the development agenda of neoliberal India are examined through one skill-training initiative in particular: Project SEAM (Skills for Employment in Apparel Manufacturing). Funded by the Indian government's Ministry of Rural Development (MoRD), implemented in partnership with a major Indian private company and operational across 14 Indian states, SEAM trains rural below-poverty-line (BPL)

youth to work in the garment industry. More than 100,000 young Indians have been trained to work in the garment industry under this scheme. How have the values of enterprise culture influenced state and private-sector representatives in conceptualizing and implementing skills-training programmes in India? This chapter answers that question by examining two key phases of the SEAM programme: the mobilization phase, in which young people are recruited to participate in the scheme, and the training phase, where unskilled/semi-skilled rural youth are taught technical and soft skills to work as sewing-machine operators in export-oriented garment units. However, the chapter does not explore the perspective of SEAM's trainees, and in particular how they experience the training programme and their shop-floor work in the garment industry. I have explored these themes elsewhere.[2]

The material presented in this chapter is based on 16 months of fieldwork in Tamil Nadu, New Delhi, and Rajasthan between October 2009 and July 2011. Within this period, 11 months of fieldwork involved working as a member of the SEAM project team, following which, additional rounds of fieldwork were conducted as an independent researcher.[3]

The network state, the network enterprise, and enterprise culture in India

The Indian state is a complex, multi-dimensional entity. The opening up of the economy to foreign investment and the forces of globalization was predicted to result in the retreat of the state (Jayal 2001). However, in practice the Indian state has survived, although it has taken on a new avatar: now engaging with a broad range of actors (non-governmental organizations, the private sector, industrial associations) to achieve developmental goals (Chandhoke 2003). Scholars use terms such as 'pluralized', 'facilitator', 'multifaceted', 'embedded', and 'multilayered' to describe the new incarnation of the Indian state, which has emerged in the context of globalization and economic liberalization (Chandhoke 2003; Sharma and Gupta 2006; Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011; Evans 1995; Sud 2012). All these terms emphasize the fact that the contemporary Indian state is not an isolated entity that is disconnected from society and its key institutions, but rather is an institution that is engaged with other actors (Chandhoke 2003; Jayal 2001). Ethnographic studies on the everyday state also endorse this view (see Sharma and Gupta 2006; Gupta and Sivaramakrishnan 2011).

While the literature is clear about the multi-dimensional nature of the Indian state, it does not adequately explain how its different facets are interconnected. Understanding the relationships between the state and its partners is particularly important in providing a framework to comprehend skills-training programmes in India – funded by the state and implemented by a number of different actors, including the private sector and NGOs.

Castells' (1998, 2006) concept of the 'network state' provides a useful analytical framework to understand how the various facets of the Indian state are interconnected. Castells describes the contemporary state as a 'network of political

institutions', which actively collaborates with a range of different actors at the global and local levels to carry out the task of governance. He writes:

> … to connect the global and the local, nation-states have asserted or fostered a process of decentralization that reaches out to regional or local governments, and even to NGOs (non-government organisations), often associated to political management. … Governance is operated in a network of political institutions that shares sovereignty in various degrees and reconfigurates itself in a variable geopolitical geometry. This is what I have conceptualized as the network state.
>
> (Castells 2006: 15)

Castells uses the term 'network state' to describe the transformation of the state in the context of globalization; his work therefore focuses largely on exploring the state vis-à-vis other supranational organizations and associations at a global level. I use the term 'network state' as an analytical tool to understand how the Indian nation-state functions in practice, as a pluralized entity that collaborates with multiple actors to deliver development programmes to its citizens.

Globalization – combined with the spread of information and communication technologies – has also transformed the nature of organizations and private enterprise, leading to the emergence of the 'network society', within which a new kind of organization, the 'network enterprise', has emerged (Castells 1996). Castells defines a network enterprise as:

> [an] organizational form built around business projects resulting from cooperation of different components of different firms, networking amongst themselves for a given project and reconfiguring their networks for the implementation of each project.
>
> (Castells 1996: 218)

Like the network state, the network enterprise is also a pluralized entity, characterized by mutual co-operation across different nodes of the firm, which collaborate for specific business projects. For Castells, 'the network is the enterprise' (Castells 1996: 218). Thus, while the firm remains the unit of accumulation of capital, management, and property rights, 'networks', which are flexible and adaptable, perform the actual business in practice.

Network enterprises have proliferated across India at a rapid rate over the past two decades. These organizations have been more than drivers of economic growth: importantly, they have also played a major role in shaping and implementing state policy. I argue that a distinguishing feature of contemporary India's development trajectory is the increasing confluence of the network state and the network enterprise. The marriage of these two institutions has established new workplaces (in global spaces such as shopping malls, industrial parks, and special economic zones), created demand for new skills, and established new kinds of partnership between state agencies and private corporations to meet India's

diverse development challenges – from infrastructure development to skills training.

Crucially, the coming together of the network state and the network enterprise has also led to a normative shift: away from a culture of dependency, towards one that values enterprise. This value of enterprise culture is actively promoted by the state, private corporations, NGOs, and industry associations, which view the young Indian citizen as a 'resource' that must be harnessed through a range of human-resource development programmes that promote education, skills training, entrepreneurship, innovation, and self-employment (Planning Commission of India 2008, 2011). These programmes centre on the individual, and in particular on the individual's ability to transform his or her life through these interventions, enabling them to benefit from growth. Skills-training programmes are often described by policy makers as initiatives that 'empower' youth to take advantage of new economic opportunities, rather than becoming a 'constraint' on the state. The excerpt from the Prime Minister's speech, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, clearly echoes this view.

As a new kind of value system, enterprise culture emphasizes the importance of individual capabilities, initiative, drive, hard work, and motivation and thus brings individual agency to the centre of the stage. With new jobs in the private sector being perceived as increasingly competitive (and insecure), enterprise culture places the onus on the individual worker to take the initiative to obtain new skills, adapt to a flexible labour market, and enhance his or her employability (Gooptu 2009). The worker in India's new workplaces is supposed to become a 'neoliberal subject' who is 'individualized and responsible for his/her own self presentation, self government, self management and self advancement' (ibid.: 46).

The values of enterprise culture are also supposed to provide individuals with a coping strategy to deal with an uncertain work environment and ensure that they continue to persevere, to create a stable and secure future for themselves. As jobs are increasingly insecure, flexible, and uncertain, workers are compelled to upgrade their skills continuously in tune with the demands of new emerging industries. They may even choose to take on more risks, by entering newer workplaces with better prospects to ensure that their skills continue to be valued and that they remain employed (see Bauman 1998; Sennett 1998; Gooptu 2009; McDowell 2009). Workers who act as enterprising subjects are also rewarded by private companies, through new human-resource management strategies, which reward initiative, efficiency, and achievement.

Why skill development?

The rise of new workplaces in India and the emergence of new kinds of jobs have brought with them a clear change in the definition of 'skills', making it a multi-dimensional concept. Unni and Rani explain this point in detail, arguing that in the early 1950s and 1960s 'skill' was defined in terms of the activities undertaken in the manufacturing sector and was measured in terms of the manual

dexterity or technical knowledge of the shop-floor worker (Unni and Rani 2008). With the emergence of new workplaces in the services and retail sectors, 'skill' has acquired a broader meaning to include 'soft skills', such as communication and presentation skills, personal grooming, and time management (ibid.). Notably, these skills are not only valued in the service sector, but also form an important component of shop-floor workers' training programmes in the manufacturing sector. This new emphasis on 'soft skills' expands the focus from the individual worker's technical abilities to include also his or her personality and 'embodied performance' in the workplace: making it essential for the worker not merely to perform a given task efficiently, but also to transform his or her personality to suit the requirements of the job (McDowell 2003, 2009).[4] This trend is particularly evident in countries like India, where the proliferation of new kinds of workplace has also increased demand for young well-trained workers who are equipped with the technical and behavioural skills that these new jobs demand.

The Indian state's vision of skill development is most clearly articulated in India's Eleventh Five Year Plan (XI FYP), covering the period 2007–2012. For the very first time, this document devoted an entire chapter to the theme of skill development. This new focus was driven by two key considerations. The first was demographic. The XI FYP explains that India's population is the youngest in the world, with the demographic bulge occurring in the 15–39 years age group. Yet 80 per cent of India's workforce does not possess 'identifiable, marketable skills', with only 2 per cent of the workforce possessing 'basic skills'. The Plan contrasts this with countries like Korea and Germany, where 96 per cent and 75 per cent of their populations respectively have basic skills training. In addition, the XI FYP highlights the fact that 80 per cent of new entrants into the workforce lack opportunities for skills training, which makes them especially vulnerable in a highly competitive job market (Planning Commission of India 2008). The presence of these 'skill gaps' was one of the driving factors behind the new policy focus on skill development. The second motive for focusing on skills training was political. Policy documents portray skill development as a panacea to ensure 'inclusive growth' – a central objective of XI FYP, and, more importantly, the driving political agenda of the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition government, which first came to power in 2004 and won its second mandate in the 2009 general election.

The XI FYP's launch set in motion three parallel streams of skills-focused activity within the Indian state. One response was the creation of a range of institutions to promote, coordinate, fund, monitor, and implement skills-training initiatives. These included the Prime Minister's National Council on Skill Development, the National Skill Development Coordination Board, and the National Skill Development Corporation. The second response was the creation of the National Skill Development Policy, drafted in 2008 and formally approved by the Cabinet in 2009. This offered a broad framework to guide the overall state response to skill development. The third response was to launch, across various ministries, a range of sectorally contextualized skills-training programmes,

following the recommendations of an Inter-Ministerial Group, which was especially constituted to address the challenge of skill development (Planning Commission of India 2008). In response to these recommendations, 17 different government departments initiated a number of initiatives focused on skills training (Planning Commission of India 2008). These efforts varied in complexity from simple funding allocations to promote skilling in departmental domain areas (in departments such as Information Technology) to more evolved programmes and sub-programmes (such as the initiatives launched by the MoRD, discussed later in this chapter). Most importantly, the XI FYP recommended the creation of the National Skill Development Mission. The Rs.228 billion (approximately £3 billion) Mission was conceived as an institutional umbrella for these various lines of action. A major objective of the Mission was to work closely with the private sector and promote Private Public Partnerships (PPPs) for skills training, across a wide range of domains (from garment manufacturing to sales and marketing).

Apart from this, a National Skill Development Policy has also been drafted by the Ministry of Labour to achieve the objectives laid down by the Skill Development Mission. States in India have also been instructed to set up State Skill Development Missions (organized in the same manner as the National Mission) to drive the skill-development initiatives at the state level.

An analysis of government policy documents and interviews with officials in the Ministry of Labour and Employment highlights three main features of the Indian state's response to the skilling challenge. First, skill-development programmes are perceived as a magic bullet, which could simultaneously generate employment, reduce poverty, educate and empower youth, and promote rural development (see Planning Commission of India 2008, 2011; Ministry of Rural Development 2008). This view highlights the centrality of skill development to the state's economic and social development agenda. The idea that skill development can transform the lives of individuals (especially when accompanied by initiative and hard work) is repeatedly emphasized by government officials and representatives of the private corporations implementing such initiatives (see Nilekani 2008: 95–8, 344). This is an important reason why placement-linked skill-development programmes became a central component of rural anti-poverty programmes such as the Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). Second, state-funded skill-development programmes are primarily implemented through a PPP model. There is broad consensus among the government officials interviewed for this study that the private sector is best placed to deliver high-quality training that is closely linked to the needs of industry. A number of government departments provide grants (in part or in full) to the private sector to conduct the training programmes across a number of different sectors. As the implementation agency of the state, the private sector develops the training content, trains young people, and also creates placement linkages in some cases. Thus, skill-development programmes provide an excellent example of how the network state and network enterprise collaborate in the development sector. Last, skill-development programmes are not simply aimed at imparting technical

skills, but, rather, are an attempt to create an entirely new workforce, with certain specific psychological and behavioural qualities, which would enable individuals to fit in perfectly in India's new workplaces. The case study of the SEAM programme in the following section exemplifies the three points raised above.

Project SEAM

Project SEAM, initiated in 2008, aims to provide, free, placement-linked skills training for rural below-poverty-line youth between the ages of 18 and 25, to equip them to work in garment clusters across India. Training is provided in a range of skills relating to garment manufacturing, from sewing-machine operations to garment checking and finishing. SEAM is funded primarily by a grant from SGSY's special projects (SGSY-SP) scheme, which was introduced in 2008 to provide placement-linked skills training to rural BPL youth through PPPs. It was initially launched as a pilot programme to test some of the underlying premises behind the new national skills-development policy, which was being drafted at that time and which was one of the first such initiatives to be launched in India. It had two unique features. First, it was structured – innovatively at the time – as a PPP between the MoRD and a subsidiary of Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) Limited. Second, unlike other skills-training initiatives, which focus merely on imparting skills training, SEAM is placement-linked. SEAM-project trainees are guaranteed placements in garment factories on successfully completing the 30-day training programme. The SEAM-project team was simultaneously creating training modules and building a number of placement links with industry, so that trainees could also obtain jobs. Together, these two characteristics made SEAM unique.

SEAM was implemented by IL&FS Clusters, a subsidiary of one of India's largest infrastructure-finance companies, Infrastructure Leasing and Financial Services (IL&FS) Limited, which is well known for financing large-scale infrastructure projects, including financing and building highways, toll roads, and bridges across the country. IL&FS (the parent company) is based in Mumbai, India's financial capital, and has regional offices across India. IL&FS is a good example of a network enterprise: the parent company, IL&FS Limited, focuses on establishing partnerships in the area of infrastructural finance, and a number of its smaller subsidiary companies work on building infrastructure across specific sectors, which include water, transportation, education, investment, and environment management. These subsidiary firms typically form partnerships with state governments (through PPPs) and establish joint-venture companies, which undertake a host of projects. These include building toll roads, creating infrastructure for small and medium industrial clusters, devising strategies for solid-waste management, and promoting eco-tourism. Thus, IL&FS and its constituent companies have strong intra- and inter-organizational networks (with the government, industrialists, private firms, and NGOs). In recent years, IL&FS and

its subsidiary companies have also been going global and have initiated international partnerships, further expanding their networks.

It is interesting to note that IL&FS Clusters had no prior experience in skills training when it undertook the SEAM pilot programme. Its main focus was on cluster development, and it worked on financing and creating infrastructure for industrial clusters across a range of sectors (agro-business, textiles, leather processing, garment manufacturing, etc.). In the process of setting up these industrial clusters, the company realized that obtaining well-trained, skilled workers was a major challenge faced by industries. The costs of training workers were too high for industries to bear alone. In addition, attrition rates were also high, making it difficult to retain workers. When the SGSY-SP programme was being designed by the MoRD, IL&FS Clusters saw a huge opportunity and submitted a proposal for the SEAM pilot project, to train rural BPL youth to work in the garment industry. The garment industry was chosen specifically because IL&FS Clusters had set up a number of textile and apparel parks and had strong partnerships with some of the major garment-manufacturing firms. IL&FS Clusters agreed to take on this project, believing that this would help to build goodwill and strengthen its relationship with both the government and the industry.

Strong networks with the garment industry enabled IL&FS Clusters to develop a training curriculum with inputs from the industry. In states like Tamil Nadu, the garment industry provided the training infrastructure (such as in-factory classrooms, sewing machines, and trainers) and also contributed funds towards developing a training curriculum, in return for a steady supply of well-trained workers. Training content was created by IL&FS Clusters' staff in consultation with international experts in garment manufacturing. IL&FS Clusters' sister company IL&FS Education (which specializes in developing multimedia-based training content in the field of technology education) created a customized soft-skills module to support the technical training module. The choice of the garment industry was crucial from the perspective of skill development, because this sector employs a large number of semi-skilled workers. Thirty-three million young people between the ages of 18 and 35 were employed in the industry in 2008, and it was estimated that by 2012, 45 million young people would be working in this industry (National Skill Development Corporation 2009). The majority of the workforce is comprised of sewing-machine operators (semi-skilled workers, who need not have completed elementary school), who can be trained very easily. This was a key factor in the success of the SEAM pilot.

As SEAM was implemented through a PPP, a network of other institutions (public and private) was also involved in monitoring different aspects of the programme. For example, the quality of training is monitored by an international agency based in South Africa, which conducts routine unannounced visits to training centres to assess the training programme and the performance of candidates. These assessments are submitted independently to the MoRD every quarter. In addition, the National Institute of Rural Development (a unit under the MoRD) conducts routine audits at training centres to check attendance registers and training records. Finally, a key feature of this programme is that it not only

guarantees work placements after training but also makes post-placement tracking of a candidate's performance mandatory. Thus, the progress of SEAM trainees as employees in garment factories is tracked for a one-year period to assess their career path within the company. This process helps IL&FS Clusters to stay in touch with candidates and recruit new trainees through these contacts. Following the success of the SEAM pilot project, which successfully trained more than 30,000 young people in record time, this initiative was extended to cover 14 major states across India. So far, more than 100,000 rural BPL youth have been trained and placed under this scheme.

The focus of this chapter now shifts to a description of two key phases of the SEAM initiative, to explain how this programme was envisioned and implemented on the ground. It demonstrates how the values of enterprise culture were communicated through the process of maximizing enrolments in the programme and training entrants to work in the garment industry. It also explains how skills training is closely linked with shaping (and at times manipulating) young people's aspirations, as young people are called on by the state and the private sector to 'transform' their lives by acquiring new skills.

Mobilizing rural below-poverty-line youth for the SEAM programme

'Mobilization' is the process of identifying and selecting rural BPL youth to enrol in the SEAM programme. In what is considered the most challenging phase of the project, young IL&FS employees (called mobilizers) travel to remote villages for meetings with a range of people, from district and block-level officials to heads of villages, self-help group members, and youth groups, to familiarize them with the SEAM programme. Mobilizers come from a variety of backgrounds: they may be former government officials, NGO workers, school- teachers, or master trainers in the garment industry. They are given fixed targets every month, and the pressure to meet these targets is very high. The fact that selection for the SEAM programme is limited to candidates between the ages of 18 and 25 who possess BPL cards, combined with the fact that there are competing anti-poverty schemes targeting the same group, makes the task of the mobilizer especially challenging. His effectiveness depends on his ability to build strong networks with the district- and village-level administration and gain their support, at the same time making the SEAM programme an attractive proposition for rural BPL youth. Mobilizers are given basic training by IL&FS Clusters on how to project the programme and communicate its key features effectively in the field. However, the training alone is insufficient, as the complex task of mobilization requires the mobilizer to demonstrate initiative and be innovative in the field.

The mobilizer epitomizes the enterprising subject. He[5] plays the role of the 'bricoleur' (Levi-Strauss 1962), intuitively devising different strategies on the spot to obtain the support of a number of key stakeholders, in order to convince young people to enrol in the programme. In his initial meetings with government

officials, he is humble, defers to the authority of government officials, highlights the financial support provided by the Rural Development Ministry, and often cites examples of senior bureaucrats and politicians who have endorsed the programme. Often during these discussions with officials, the mobilizer brings out a small photo album displaying photographs of prominent politicians inaugurating training centres or presenting certificates to candidates who have successfully completed the training programme. This gesture gives the programme credibility and plays an important role in obtaining local-government support for the project. Such support is crucial, as it gives the mobilizer access to the village. Mobilizers spread awareness about the SEAM programme by distributing pamphlets containing programme details, by running door-to-door campaigns, and by meetings with school teachers[6] and members of self-help groups.

Job fairs are the most important and effective channels through which rural BPL youth are identified and recruited for the SEAM programme. The mobilizer plays a crucial role in organizing job fairs by collaborating with a range of key actors, from officials at district, block, and village levels to human-resource managers with some of the major garment companies (who are potential employers for the SEAM trainees). The job fair is a major event, which is increasingly becoming common in villages in India, particularly in states like Tamil Nadu and Gujarat, which have a strong industrial presence. The fair is held in a community hall or a school, or most often in the village square under a tree. The mobilizer brings with him his compact 'mobilization kit', which contains banners, pamphlets, posters, and a small portable (battery-operated) overhead projector and screen. Banners are hung on trees, proclaiming (in local languages) messages such as 'Do you want to transform your life?' or 'Look ahead to a new, bright future – join the SEAM programme'. Pictures of training centres, with young men and women wearing neat uniforms in gleaming garment-making factories, are displayed. The village square is transformed into a site where aspirations are created and nurtured, and expectations about the possibilities of a secure, stable 'company job' in a garment factory are raised.

In some states like Rajasthan, mobilizers are particularly creative and make a dramatic entry into the job fair, an act that reflects their innovative entrepreneurial spirit. They arrive in the village in a Rozgar Rath (livelihood vehicle). These are typically auto-rickshaws or cars, which are covered with colourful posters and photographs of the SEAM programme. The vehicle is fitted with a large microphone (the kind often used in political campaigns in India), enabling the mobilizer to ride around the village announcing the job fair and inviting young people to participate in the event. Often the village Pradhan or Sarpanch launches the Rozgar Rath, to mark the beginning of the job fair. This endorsement by the head of the village is often fundamental to the success of the scheme. Often film music is played loudly in the Rozgar Rath, to attract the attention of village youth. Following this, the mobilizer arrives at the site of the job fair, ushering in potential trainees and welcoming district and village officials. Typically the audience consists of 150–200 people, a mixed group consisting of men and women of all ages. Young people between the ages of 18 and 25

typically constitute about 40 per cent of the audience. As the job fair begins, the mobilizer sits on the dais along with a local politician, a district official, and a human-resource manager from a garment company (a potential employer of new trainees). The job fair often begins with the national anthem (a gesture which highlights the fact that the programme is funded by the state), following which the village head and local government officials address the audience and speak about the great possibilities that this programme represents for the employment of village youth and the reduction of rural poverty. They also highlight the new opportunities for employment that are coming up near the village, and the important role played by skill-development initiatives in ensuring that young people in the village have access to these opportunities.

The mobilizer then begins his speech, and as he does so his personality is transformed from the docile, self-effacing person that he was in the presence of the government officials to a confident and inspiring orator. His speech is about high aspirations and how the SEAM programme can transform lives and help young people to realize their dreams. The speech is peppered with rhetorical questions: 'Do you want to build a better future for yourself and your family?' … 'Do you want to be able to set up your own garment-manufacturing factory some day?' He cites examples of how ordinary people can achieve extraordinary things by simply taking initiative: for example, the owner of a chain of large garment factories in Rajasthan who started out as a sewing-machine operator 20 years ago. He tells the audience that it is possible for them also to achieve the same dream. The mobilizer ends his speech by playing a catchy pre-recorded song in Hindi on the theme of progress through skill development, composed specifically for the purpose of mobilizing rural youth for the SEAM programme. The words of the song are roughly translated below:

> Let us travel together towards the future, let us go ahead, let us go ahead!
> Let us travel together towards the path of the progress we desire, let us go ahead, let us go ahead!
> As we now travel on this path, pursue progress and develop ourselves – we can see the bright future that lies ahead!
> We can see our dreams getting fulfilled!
> A new sun has now risen and we can see a new day!
> We will realize all our dreams, a new day has come, a new day has come!
>
> (Mobilization Song, IL&FS Clusters, 2010)

The words of this song effectively capture the promise and hope that the SEAM programme offers to young people. The key themes of enterprise culture, individual empowerment and agency, the potential for self-development and progress, and the promise of a bright new future are echoed in this song and in the mobilizer's speech. While the song plays, the mobilizer distributes application forms, along with free pens and SEAM stickers, to the audience. The audience rushes to grab the application forms as the mobilizer explains the key criteria for eligibility, the format of the form, and the supporting documents that must be

attached to it. Two days later, the mobilizer returns to the village to collect completed application forms, verify forms, and interview eligible candidates. During these brief interviews candidates are tested for manual dexterity and colour blindness, to assess their suitability for employment in the garment industry. Successful candidates are then given a formal letter of appointment, giving details of the training process, the location of the training centre, and the starting date of the training.

There is a great deal of enthusiasm among young people enrolling for the SEAM programme. In focus-group discussions with young women at one job-fair site in Kancheepuram district in Tamil Nadu, we discussed what youth expect of programmes like SEAM. Participants in the discussion repeatedly mentioned their desire to move out of agriculture and obtain a 'permanent company job' in a factory. For these young women, such programmes represented a chance to step out of the village and to move out of agricultural work into respected jobs within factories. The words of Selvi,[7] an enthusiastic and articulate 18-year old girl who had enrolled for the SEAM programme in 2010, encapsulate this idea clearly:

> I have studied until class five, and had to drop out of school at a young age because of family problems. I have been assisting my family since then, taking care of my younger brother and also selling vegetables in the local market. I earn about Rs.2,000 per month and I had no other opportunities to earn money. I chose to enrol in this programme as Rajan Sir [the mobilizer] said that this would help me get a respectable company job. I want to work hard, be independent, and earn money so that I can look after my family. I hope that SEAM will help me achieve this goal.
>
> (Selvi, group discussion, February 2010)

Young people's perception of these 'company jobs' was one of stability and comfort: a perception that does not conform to the reality of factory work in the garment sector, which involves working long hours, in multiple shifts. These perceptions, prompted by the mobilizers at the job fair, played an important role in shaping potential trainees' expectations of factory work. Three other young women in the informal focus group dreamed of setting up their own tailoring shop in the village and saw the SEAM training programme as an opportunity to do this. Another young girl, who had completed elementary school, said that one of her biggest regrets was that she never had a chance to complete her education. For her, SEAM represented an opportunity to learn something new.

Events like the job fair repeatedly emphasize the transformative potential of young people's agency. Such events persistently call on young people to be entrepreneurial, to work hard, take initiative, and build a stable and secure future for themselves and their families. This encourages some respondents to take risks and make the most of new opportunities; yet for others, these expectations of family and society are described as a 'burden'. For example, six out of the ten girls who participated in a group discussion in Kancheepuram reported that they

enrolled in SEAM only because their families had 'pushed them' to do so. These young women were escorted by eager family members, who were keen for their daughters to get coveted company jobs and bring home an additional income.

Not only do job fairs call on young people to be entrepreneurial and learn new skills; they also shape aspirations, by laying down a new set of norms for how young people should behave, prescribing the kinds of goals they should aspire to, and outlining the kinds of responsibilities that they have to their families and society as a whole. Thus, young trainees enter the SEAM training centre not solely with their individual motivation or interests in acquiring new skills but with their family's high expectations of them.

The creation of enterprising subjects through skills training

The SEAM programme trains young people to work as sewing-machine operators on the factory floor of large garment-manufacturing firms. India's garment industry is now booming (after a slight slump during the recession in 2008), and the demand for young, well-trained sewing-machine operators is increasing. The garment companies that have forged placement links with the SEAM programme are among India's largest exporters, supplying international brands such as Levis, Marks and Spencer, Victoria's Secret, and Triumph. The SEAM training programme has been designed with the requirements of these large buyers in mind. IL&FS Clusters has established its training centres (known as IL&FS Skills Schools) in partnership with some of the major garment industries across the country; these industries typically provide sewing machines and other infrastructural support for the training programme. The SEAM trainers are employed and trained by IL&FS Clusters, which ensures that the quality and style of training is standardized across the country. The training modules are designed in the form of short films, dubbed in seven major Indian languages. The role of the trainer is restricted to that of a facilitator who presents the training module and works closely with each trainee to ensure that they keep up with the module on the screen. Thus, the training process is highly individualized; the trainee learns to be individually responsible for his or her progress from the very first class. Training takes place over a 30-day period, six days a week. Trainees are typically given subsidized or free meals, a transport allowance, and (in most cases) free accommodation.

The training process is an intensive and immersive process, which focuses on equipping young trainees with basic technical skills (including operating an industrial sewing machine, cutting, stitching, finishing, and checking garments) and soft skills (via modules on efficiency, time management, financial management, discipline, punctuality, communication skills, yoga, and personal hygiene). A key objective of this initial phase of training is to orient young trainees to the factory environment, sensitizing them to the work culture within the garment factory. Trainers explain that the latter aspect is especially important, considering the fact that most new SEAM trainees have had no work experience and have never seen a factory before. They are unused to working in closed spaces

according to fixed schedules and being constantly supervised and monitored. This is a major challenge for trainers, who cite examples of how trainees often wander out of the classroom in the middle of a training session in the first few days, simply because they feel bored. This makes the soft-skills component of the programme (conducted in parallel with the technical sessions) an important aspect of the training process.

The training process uses two main tools to transform previously unemployed, unskilled youth into efficient and self-motivated sewing-machine operators. First, the training centre is designed to simulate the factory environment, exposing young trainees to the ambience of the factory from the very first day of training. Trainees wear uniforms, and the trainer assumes the role of the factory supervisor when conducting the training session. During the first week of training, the individual performance of each trainee is measured and timed. The time taken to thread a needle or stitch a perfectly straight line on a piece of fabric is measured, and the trainees' results are compared. This exercise brings the individual into focus, instilling in the young workers a competitive spirit, driving them to strive towards individual efficiency. The performance of candidates is monitored every week through tests and stitching exercises, and trainees who are hard working and efficient are given small prizes to reward their effort. In some cases extra classes are organized for trainees who lag behind, and many of these young people end up putting in long hours studying training manuals and revising the previous day's lessons, before beginning training the next day. Individual efficiency is emphasized (and rewarded) during the training process. The fact that workers in some companies are paid according to a piece rate makes this focus on individual efficiency particularly important. The strong emphasis on an individualized work ethic is also balanced by teaching trainees the value of teamwork, through a series of interactive games in the classroom. However, even here the contribution that the individual makes to the team is highlighted, as individuals who perform best within each team are recognised as 'winners' and awarded prizes.

A key message which emerges out of both the technical and soft-skills training processes is that speed, efficiency, hard work, motivation, and drive are rewarded in the workplace. Many of these values are described by trainers as 'life skills', which could be useful not only in the workplace but also in the trainees' own personal lives. This idea is also the focus of soft-skills training modules, which particularly aim to transform the attitudes of young people. These modules also serve another important purpose: they teach young people to aspire high, and to work hard towards achieving their personal and professional goals. For example, trainers often encourage trainees who have dropped out of school to continue their studies through distance-learning programmes or private classes. Trainers constantly cite examples of major industry leaders and fabled entrepreneurs, such as Infosys founder N. R. Narayanamurthy or Reliance Group founder Dhirubhai Ambani, using them as role models to highlight how hard work, initiative, and motivation can help trainees to overcome poverty and transform their own lives. Trainees who are thinking of dropping out are counselled

by trainers to persist. After a full day's training, inspirational movies (such as *Guru*, based on the life of Dhirubhai Ambani, telling the story of an entrepreneur from a poor family who becomes a big industrialist) are screened for trainees in their spare time. In addition, short films highlighting the value of hard work, workplace discipline, and the importance of following rules are played for the trainees during the training process, gradually making the norms and values that govern the new workplace a part of the personality of the young worker.

Thus, within just 30 days, SEAM seeks to transform unskilled youth into well-trained, enterprising subjects, ready for employment in the new workplace. On successful completion of the training programme, trainees are presented with certificates at an elaborate ceremony. Their parents are invited to attend the event, and in some cases a prominent local politician or the District Collector presides over the function and distributes certificates. For many trainees this certificate (which features not just the IL&FS logo but also the Lion Capital emblem of the Government of India) is a symbol of great achievement and viewed as a passport to obtaining well paid, secure jobs and escaping poverty. This was clearly articulated by Mala, a 19-year-old woman, who was interviewed in Kancheepuram on the day she received her certificate:

> I have got a certificate for the first time in my life. I feel very happy about this. This is a big day for me and my family. I now want to work hard, and contribute to my family's income. In the future, I hope I can become a Manager or Supervisor in a company … if that does not work out, I would like to open my own tailoring unit in my village.
>
> (Mala, group discussion, February 2010)

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the centrality of the values of enterprise culture to neoliberal India's development trajectory. It has done so through the lens of India's skills-training programmes: a development-policy priority that emerged after the country's transition from socialism to economic neoliberalism. The significant influence of enterprise culture has been identified in the objectives of the skills-development initiative and in the instrumentality of its implementation. The chapter has also illustrated the manner in which programme beneficiaries are encouraged to adopt the values of enterprise culture, and the ways in which this shapes their own subjectivities and future aspirations. In particular, the chapter has explored how the implementers of initiatives like SEAM have also adopted these values: the Indian network state, in departing from conventional policy approaches and embracing the private sector as an implementer of policy; and the Indian private network enterprise, in proactively developing and scaling solutions to the state's perceived policy challenges. In doing so, this chapter highlights a possibly deeper role played by enterprise culture in India's neoliberal development trajectory: that of reconfiguring the relationship between the state, citizen, and private enterprise.

Notes

1 Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh's Independence Day Address to the Nation, 15, August 2006. Available online at: www.hindu.com/nic/independence.htm, accessed 1 March 2013.
2 This aspect is explored in my forthcoming doctoral thesis to be submitted to the University of Oxford: 'The network state, the network enterprise and skill development in India'.
3 I worked as a member of the SEAM project team from October 2009 to August 2010. Subsequent rounds of fieldwork were conducted in 2011.
4 See also Upadhya's chapter in this volume.
5 Mobilizers are always young men.
6 This strategy targets school drop outs above 18 years of age.
7 All names used in this chapter are pseudonyms.

4 New spiritualism and the micro-politics of self-making in India's enterprise culture

Nandini Gooptu

The contemporary spiritual upsurge

The opening ceremony of the Commonwealth Games in Delhi in October 2010 featured a thousand young men and women executing various yoga *asanas* (postures), following which the performers initiated a gigantic spiralling movement around the arena to depict *kundalini*. In yogic theory, kundalini is the latent energy store, or dormant power, or *shakti*, which lies at the base of the human spine in a coiled form, often imagined as a serpent in repose. As the performers circled the arena, a monumental illuminated human figure, in the iconic meditative *padmasana* (lotus position), majestically emerged from the floor at the centre of the arena. Gradually, seven *chakras* (energy centres) were revealed along the spinal column of the meditating figure. This represented the awakening of kundalini through the spiritual practice of yoga and meditation, its uncoiling or ascent up the spine, and its upward progress through the various chakras, from the coccyx up to the crown of the head, to achieve the highest level of spiritual attainment. This display represented the unification of the individual *atma* (soul) with the *paramatma* (universal divine consciousness): the union of the mind, body, and spirit, and the unleashing of divine spiritual power and energy.

Here, an official vision of personal spiritual power as the core of national identity and cultural heritage was showcased. This specific rendition of spiritualism in the Commonwealth Games is striking, for it projected a solitary individual in the form of the towering, meditating human figure in a state of self-awakening and spiritual enlightenment. This epitomizes the central preoccupation with personal identity and individual agency in the resurgence of spiritualism in India in the past couple of decades. Spiritualism is one of the vast range of artefacts and practices of self-making and personal well-being now sweeping across India. Spiritual practices, such as yoga, meditation, and traditional healing therapies, are now widespread and ubiquitous, being promoted by both individual *gurus* (spiritual teachers) and spiritual organizations, in response to an escalating demand for self-help and self-care tools in post-liberalization India (Nanda 2009). The media has also played a pivotal role in orchestrating spiritualism. India's major English-language newspaper, the *Times of India*, introduced a daily column on spiritualism in the 1990s, entitled 'The Speaking Tree'. Spiritual television programmes

in Hindi and various regional vernacular languages feature on numerous religious channels, notably market leaders *Aastha*, *Sanskar*, and *Zee Jagaran*, all launched between 2000 and 2004, with *Aastha* boasting an estimated 200 million viewers.[1]

Today's spiritualism draws upon pre-existing Indian traditions with their emphasis on personal introspection. However, the current concern with the self is different from such prior manifestations, being devoid of connotations of personal asceticism, self-abnegation, and world-renunciation. Instead, the primary concern now is with self-development, self-fulfilment, and self-empowerment. In order to signal this centrality of the individual self in contemporary versions of spiritualism, the term 'new' spiritualism (hereafter NS) has been used in this chapter. NS is usually associated with New Age movements in the West and various forms of spirituality, which ascribe divinity and sacred significance to humans, to nature, and to everyday life (Heelas 1996, 2008). NS celebrates the autonomous self and one's own unique subjective life, and it seeks self-actualization and self-expression. Relying on the 'self-ethic', NS privileges one's inner consciousness, intuition, and conscience as the guide to action (ibid.; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Lynch 2007, 2008). Indian NS resonates with these conceptions, as expressed for example by Bindiya Murgal, 'inner work therapist and spiritual scientist', who writes in the *Times of India* that spirituality 'gives you the freedom to connect with the infinite possibilities of God manifested in the universe through your thoughts and experiences. It's more personal, immediate.'[2] Oriental varieties of spiritualism, derived from Hinduism and Buddhism in particular, had developed as part of NS in the West from the 1960s (Pasture 2011). Many of these practices assimilated new ideas, ranging from psychotherapy to personality-development and positive-thinking techniques (ibid.: 90–1). Some of these have now gained popularity in India, following their Western sojourn (Frøystad 2009).

The ascendance of NS in post-liberalization India coincided with the emergence of discourses on enterprise culture as the key to India's ascent to the status of global power (Introduction to this volume). Indeed, influential arguments have been advanced to emphasize the interdependence of India's putatively antique and unique spirituality and the supposedly essential entrepreneurial spirit of her people. For instance, Kamal Nath, former Minister of Commerce and Industry, writes:

> The apparent entrepreneurial instinct of Indians is in no way in conflict with the country's long spiritual tradition. The two are complementary resources that have given the average Indian a sense of timelessness and infinite patience.… This mental composure helps Indians to take their destiny in their own hands; when pushed to the edge, they rescue themselves, and don't wait for others to save them.
>
> (Nath 2008: 24)

The growing entanglement of business and spiritualism is now well known. Since the 1990s, 'corporate spiritualism' has become an expanding, mainstream

field, with spiritual intelligence being highly valued by global managers and corporate executives. Spiritualism is also thought to infuse business and corporate practice with values and ethics (Narayanswamy 2008; Nandram and Borden 2010). Moreover, Hinduism, especially in its Vedantic version, is being reinterpreted as a source of cultural capital for Indian business and entrepreneurial activity (Fuller and Harriss 2005; Birtchnell 2009). Spirituality is deployed in the corporate workplace in human-resource management as a tool to induce self-motivation and self-regulation (Upadhya in this volume).

The wider analytical literature on NS offers further perspectives on the intersection of capitalism, corporate culture, and spiritualism. Paul Heelas (1996: 29–32), writing on spiritualism in the West, has differentiated between spiritual 'purists' who reject modernity and capitalism, verging on world-renunciation, and 'mainstream-empowerers' or 'spiritual materialists', who seek to make a better life within capitalism and emphasize self-empowerment and prosperity, often deploying spiritualism in an instrumental way to engage with the capitalist system and to gain material success. This characterization of 'mainstream-empowerer' would apply to much of contemporary Indian NS. Carrette and King (2005) have trenchantly criticized some versions of Western NS as commodified and privatized lifestyle products of consumer modernity. They have also argued that spirituality consolidates the norms and values of competitive business and enterprise. Carrette and King (ibid.: 17–19) identify 'four degrees of relative accommodation of the ideology of capitalism' by NS. At one end of the spectrum lies 'revolutionary or anti-capitalist spirituality', which, in fact, denies the legitimacy of capitalism, followed by 'business ethics and reformist spirituality', which accepts the pursuit of profit and the primacy of market capitalism, but seeks to temper them with spiritually-informed ethical and moral values. The induction of spiritualism in Indian business, in some ways, falls into this category. 'Individualist-consumerist spirituality' is deeply entangled with consumerism; it sacralizes utilitarian individualism and espouses a 'pick and mix approach to religious traditions'. Echoing this view, Meera Nanda (2009: 199) uses the epithet 'prosperity religion' to describe some forms of contemporary Indian spiritualism which help to 'sanctify wealth' and consumer gratification. Finally, 'capitalist spirituality' marks 'a subtle shift beyond an exclusive emphasis upon the individual self and towards a concern with making the individual employee/consumer function as effectively as possible for the benefit of corporate organizations and the "global economy"' (Carrette and King 2005: 17–19). Upadhya in this volume discusses some manifestations of this capitalist spirituality in the Indian corporate workplace. Maya Warrier (2005: 14–15) offers a somewhat different interpretation of the relationship between consumerism and NS, with specific reference to Indian middle classes and their 'recognition of individual choice as a key to negotiating life in a "modern" world'. In the context of the expansion of consumer choice and opportunities, Warrier argues that contemporary forms of guru-oriented spiritual practice represent a 'religion of choice', which includes 'personal freedom to create for oneself a religious life conducive to one's particular individual tastes and dispositions', as well as 'self-authorship of a highly personalized form of religious faith'.

While the literature sheds light on the corporate appropriation of NS, and its myriad interconnections with consumer culture, this chapter illuminates the largely unexplored question of how the ethic of enterprise is socially disseminated through NS to embrace a wider audience, not directly concerned with business or economic enterprise. Given the elision of spiritualism with business and management practices, ideals, and values, it is to be expected that NS would serve as a vehicle for the propagation of the norm of enterprising conduct in wider society, by promoting new modes of self-making that can be practised by all, beyond the realm of business and enterprise. This analytical theme is addressed here by focusing on the 'enterprising self' and exploring how it is constituted by NS. Both NS and enterprise culture are centrally concerned with the individual subject agent. At the heart of the enterprise imaginary is the unfettered enterprising individual, characterized by the virtues of innovation, optimism, initiative, and creativity, as well as the capacity to turn adversity into opportunity through constant, energetic striving in quest of prosperity and success; this enterprising subject is also self-governed, self-reliant, self-responsible, and self-managed (Introduction to this volume; National Knowledge Commission 2008: 1–4; Keat 1991: 5–6; Rose 1992; Burchell 1993: 275). NS is similarly concerned with the autonomous, empowered, individual self. This chapter analyses the interplay and synergy between the two, by investigating how an active, authorial self is discursively produced in NS, and how NS facilitates the micro-politics of self-making in the construction of India's enterprise culture.

Spreading the spiritual message

The primary aim of this chapter is to unravel how NS forges the idea of the enterprising self for all to practise in everyday life, and not just in the sphere of business. Key concepts and notions pertaining to an enterprising personhood, which find expression in NS will, thus, be studied here. The analytical focus is, therefore, on the *message* of NS as disseminated by spiritual leaders and organizations for mass consumption. This chapter does not discuss the reception of ideas or the perspective of ordinary practitioners. Nor does it address the theological or philosophical aspects of spiritualism, for discussion on these seldom, if ever, features in much of contemporary NS. A package of formulaic and simplified precepts is usually circulated for easy and digestible public edification. Scriptural references are cited instrumentally to embellish spiritual messages and to lend them the weight and authority of antique wisdom and knowledge. As noted in the introduction to a volume of collected writings on spiritualism from the 'Speaking Tree' column of the *Times of India*:

> It [i.e., spiritualism] deconstructs the complex layers and complicated nuances related to life, religion and spirituality and hands down little pearls of wisdom in an easy to understand and follow format.… This is compact wisdom, as handed down through the ages.
>
> (*Times of India* 2010: 10–11)

Contemporary forms of spiritualism that have become most widely prevalent are based on yoga and meditation, and are chiefly concerned with personal, psychological, and physical well-being, happiness, and success (Nanda 2009). This chapter covers four such prominent examples of spiritualism, rather than concentrating on one case, in order to draw out some key, common, recurrent themes and features of NS messages in India today. Some of the spiritual organizations and practices discussed here, such as the Brahma Kumaris (BKs) and Shivyog, have been chosen because they have a major presence on prime-time religious television, with the BKs featuring in one of the most popular television shows. Others, such as Pranic Healing (PH) and Bharat Soka Gakkai (BSG), have been selected because they enjoy a substantial following in the city of Kolkata, where fieldwork for this research was conducted. Primary research was mainly concentrated on internet web-based and printed promotional literature and television presentations by spiritual teachers and organizations, these being the most important modes of dissemination of their ideas. This was supplemented, in the case of BSG, with key-informant interviews, and for PH with participant and non-participant observations at some public events organized by them.

Brahma Kumaris

The Brahma Kumaris are distinctive because women, mostly addressed as 'sisters', act as spiritual leaders in the organization. BKs were set up as a spiritual order in western India before India's independence, with an emphasis on 'world-rejecting' renunciation. A section of BKs expanded to the West in subsequent decades, when they became increasingly oriented towards a 'newer spirituality based instrumentalism' and espoused the notion of personal self-awakening largely as a practical life skill and a personality-development tool (Wallis 2002: 49; Babb 1986: chapters 4–6). Having acquired an international following, in recent years BKs have again focused attention within India, catering to the burgeoning demand for self-help and positive-thinking guidance. BKs have gained a mass following, primarily through their immensely popular prime-time Hindi television series, 'Awakening with Brahma Kumaris', which has been running for several years on the religious *Aastha* channel. BK programmes offer psychological-cum-spiritual counselling and advice, in a psycho-therapeutic mode, similar to mental health chat shows.

Shivyog

'Union with the Infinite' through Shivyog is propounded by Swami Shivananda, a saffron-clad *sadhu* (ascetic) who has a prominent television presence with a regular slot on the *Aastha* channel.[3] His *ashrams* (monasteries or retreats) are located in Gurgaon near Delhi, Lucknow, and Karjat near Mumbai, catering largely to personnel of the private corporate sector. Shivananda also travels to various Indian cities to address a wider general audience with long lectures in

Hindi, peppered with English, lasting for several hours at a time, along with offering spiritual training courses. Many of Shivananda's lectures, given in large urban venues, are televised on the *Aastha* channel. While mainly based on the teachings of Hindu *Siddha* ascetic worshippers of Lord Shiva, Shivananda's spiritual portfolio consists of a bricolage of a number of different practices: yogic meditation; crystal healing techniques; clairvoyance based on Siddha knowledge systems; Vedic *Vaastu* architectural doctrines; and counselling and positive-thinking techniques.

Pranic healing

A similar, though somewhat less varied, eclectic spiritual ensemble is offered by the Pranic Healing Trust, which draws upon Buddhist and Hindu spiritual traditions of yoga and meditation, as well as healing techniques based on the manipulation of energy and vibrations.[4] The spiritual mastermind is Grand Master Choa Kok Sui (1952–2007), who formed the organization in the Philippines in 1987, which subsequently developed a worldwide network. The Kolkata chapter was inaugurated by some enthusiasts in the mid-1990s and now has an extensive following and a vibrant network. PH advertises itself as a non-invasive, non-touch therapeutic system and has several healing centres, including some at major private hospitals in the city. The PH Trust offers training courses on healing, spirituality, and prosperity, but it also regularly organizes highly-publicized free meditation and healing demonstration sessions, which help to attract new followers. These sessions, some of which I attended, are widely advertised in the media and through mass mobile phone text messages, and are also reported in the press.[5] The taster sessions, often held at plush venues and conference halls, have something of a corporate business ethos, albeit embellished with incense sticks and similar other accoutrements to signify a spiritual ambience. Discussions are usually held in Hindi and Bengali on demand from the audience.

Bharat Soka Gakkai

BSG, inaugurated in 1986, is a branch of Soka Gakkai International, described as a lay Buddhist association, established in its present form in Japan in 1975. With Dr Daisaku Ikeda as its current president, it has developed as an international movement.[6] BSG draws upon Buddhism from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, a thirteenth-century Japanese priest, who interpreted the Buddhist text *Lotus Sutra*. BSG has a strong following among Kolkata's middle classes, with a number of neighbourhood groups, which meet regularly for spiritual discussion, in addition to engaging in meditation and chanting.[7] BSG members have also organized a major international exhibition on the *Lotus Sutra* in Kolkata, which I attended, and it has convened meetings and conferences on the subjects of peace, human values, and education.

Self-belief and discovering the powerful inner self

The first step in the spiritual journey is to become aware of the inner power of the self – the mind and the soul. The popular TV programme 'Awakening with Brahma Kumaris'[8] describes self-empowerment techniques that are claimed to harness the 'incredible power' of the human mind, which can help one to take control of one's life experiences and create one's own reality. 'You are what you think' is a key message, concentrating on 'the energy of the human mind', which 'is one of the greatest … energy resources of the universe' and which, when properly deployed, gives 'the keys to happiness and contentment as well as to improving our relationships and circumstances'.[9] A typical positive-thinking session starts with the charismatic Sister Shivani urging the audience to have the following conviction: 'I am a powerful being. I am a powerful soul. I have the choice how to create my life.… It is possible. It is easy. It is natural.'[10]

At a PH demonstration that I attended, 'soul consciousness' or 'soul realization' was described as the first step in spiritual initiation through meditation, which affords the deepest knowledge of oneself, leading on to achieving 'oneness with the higher soul or divine consciousness'. The practitioner 'discover[s] the true nature of the soul', and thus gains control of his or her own life: 'It makes you strong and gives you the ability to be centred within and to become more balanced'. 'You are the boss, take charge of your life' was the refrain used during demonstration sessions.[11]

From Shivyog, we learn that we can unleash the infinite potential that derives from the divine power residing within us, and we can thus create our own destiny and achieve all material and spiritual goals: '*Aham Brahmasmi* – I create my own destiny'.[12] Shivananda explains in his televised lectures that with the practice of Shivyog:

> You will find miracles happening in and around you, but in reality there is no miracle.… You are the magician; you are the creator; …You just learn how to develop your inner powers and the inner strength that is already present within you but you were unaware of it.

The message is: be aware of the power of your mind, know what you want and make your choice, be steadfast in your aim and determination, and have a desire – 'a burning desire' (this was expressed in English in his lecture), and you can fulfil your dreams.

According to BSG, Nichiren Daishonin interpreted the inner meanings of the *Lotus Sutra* to preach the message that all can attain Buddhahood, or enlightenment, in this life. The lotus, in which the fruit and the flower bloom at the same time, represents 'the simultaneity of cause and effect'. The *Sutra* reveals that 'all people are originally endowed with the state of Buddhahood and can reveal it instantly', through service, prayer, and chanting, and by nurturing one's Buddha or enlightened nature through self-polishing and personal effort (Ikeda 2007:

66–7). Ikeda (ibid.: 12) considers it 'a humanistic people-centric religion', with universal human happiness and peace of mind as its supreme goal.

Being independent, assuming responsibility, and exercising choice

In order to mobilize one's inner power, various methods are recommended, buttressed by references to a spiritual corpus of knowledge. In this process, the key concepts of responsibility, choice, and individual autonomy, reminiscent of the valued and essential attributes of the neoliberal enterprising self, also find a central place in NS. BK teaching tells us that we need to 'let go' and relinquish our dependence on external or outer elements, be it other people, events, or objects, and become centred on our inner selves and rely on our inner divine energy. If we allow ourselves to be influenced by the opinion of other people or by our external circumstances, not only do we court unhappiness and misery, but we abdicate our own choice, become powerless, fail to take responsibility for our own actions and conditions, and blame others and external forces for our woes, failure, lack of contentment, and unhappiness. A key step in embracing happiness and regaining control over our own lives then is to overcome our dependence on external factors, take ownership of our own choices, and assume responsibility.[13]

Similarly, in PH's soul-realization demonstration, at the beginning of the exercise on meditation, the audience was urged to 'let go', forgive those who vitiated their lives, and acknowledge the shared divinity of all humans, even those whom they found abhorrent. This act of forgiveness suffuses the heart (or the heart chakra or energy centre) with divine peace and love, with which the meditator then blesses the earth. Following this, during meditation, the earth's energy flows back towards the head, or the crown chakra. In this way a positive transformation takes place through re-energization and activation of inner power, with the starting point being a detachment from external elements and 'letting go'.

Avoidance of dependence encompasses not only other humans and this-worldly elements, but also God. BKs point out that God does not determine our destiny, nor control our lives. God cannot change our lives, it is repeatedly noted, but we ourselves do, armed with the power gained through spirituality, meditation, and God's love.[14] BSG warns against:

> [falling] into the trap of practising 'dependent faith', where we pin our hopes on having our prayers answered through the divine or transcendent powers of gods or Buddhas. This is a typical example of viewing the law as outside oneself … the essence of which is escapism.
>
> (Ikeda 2007: 44)

Importantly also,

> [chanting], rather than being a prayer to an external being,… is an expression of the determination of the human spirit, seeking to come into rhythm

> with the reality of the universe. Through continuing in this practice of determined intention we bring forth our highest potential from within our lives.[15]

With such an emphasis on the independent self, the role of the spiritual teacher or leader assumes a different orientation from that of similar pre-existing figures. The spiritual teacher is, of course, prominent in some of the above cases, but the guru is seen as a source of spiritual inspiration and knowledge, not the focus of worship as the earthly manifestation of the divine. PH and BSG practitioners, for instance, organize their activities based on the teachings of their spiritual preceptor, whom they do not worship, while the BKs and Shivananda cast the spiritual teacher as a therapist or a counsellor and a moral-ethical guide, trainer, or instructor. This is fundamentally different from the ways in which devotees have hitherto related to established spiritual leaders. As Lawrence Babb (1986: chapters 8–9) shows for the nationally renowned Sai Baba, who died in 2011, these earlier gurus had been revered either as divine *avatars* (incarnations) or for their ability to perform miracles and for conferring their blessings and grace on their disciples, whereby the disciples could attain their desired goal. Here the disciple is a helpless supplicant, seeking benediction and miraculous intervention from the guru. In contrast, followers of NS gurus receive knowledge and guidance from the preceptor to empower themselves mentally and spiritually. A BSG practitioner, who previously revered another guru, explained: 'In the past, I used to pray to my guru to help me, now I pray to gain the strength to help myself.' Contemporary spiritual practitioners, then, are not expected to offer prayer, blind devotion, or faithful, unconditional submission to a God or a deified guru, or to rely on either. Instead, they are to draw upon divine consciousness and cosmic energy to gather power and strength to help themselves, by deploying techniques learned from the spiritual teacher.

Enhancing positivity and transforming the self

The arrogation of all responsibility and power by the individual, which is also associated with enterprising conduct, requires attention to be focused on self-transformation and change in thought, belief, and action. BKs point out that by changing ourselves, and specifically by developing positive thoughts and feelings and making the right choices, we emanate positive vibrations or energy from our mind, which then has a beneficial impact on our lives. The principle of 'synchronicity' in the cosmos is invoked to explain that what happens in the world and to us is determined by the transmission of energy and vibrations in the cosmos that we create through our thoughts:

> Thoughts have a magnetic power; they can change reality.
> Change yourself and the whole world will and can be changed.
> As you create a thought you create vibrations.… If you have pure 100% clean thought – you gravitate a good situation towards yourself.… If you send positive vibrations, then you trigger positive response [in others and

> create positive situations]. Have faith in yourself – real faith that you can change – then you can.[16]

It is further explained that if one 'churns' or dwells on negative thoughts, then these become deep-seated behaviour patterns and entrenched dispositions or '*sanskar'*: the stored baggage of psychic impressions. Such ingrained negative propensities also release toxins in the body and radiate negative energy.

But how does one learn to espouse positive thoughts to help create the right vibrations? BKs teach that Raja yoga meditation is the means through which one becomes calm, balanced, centred, and self-aware, and in this way one achieves a transformation in one's thoughts. Spiritual serenity and wisdom then become the source of right judgement and decisions. In addition, the law of karma – that we reap the fruits of our own actions – determines what happens to us in *this* life, and not just in the after-life or in future lives. Seemingly echoing the language of business, it is further explained that some of our actions and thoughts deposit negative balances in our 'karmic account', which then adversely affect our lives. To reverse these negative transactions: 'Convert negative account into positive account, purity and love; heal internally'. Good karma is to remain calm and stable in the face of our problems and adversities, and to address them with equanimity. Meditation connects us with the supreme power, and consequently the love of God provides the guide to good karma, and also gives us the knowledge, the inner strength, and 'the power and the love' to remain stable.[17] In this way, the Brahma Kumaris impart a set of guiding principles on positive thinking and self-development, but crucially these are imbued with a spiritual dimension by invoking the notions of cosmic energy and vibrations, and of karma, as well as promoting meditation, in order to imbibe divine love and energy, as the tool of self-knowledge and personal transformation.

PH and Shivyog are similar in several respects in their approaches, as indeed they are to BKs. Both Shivyog and PH hold that unhappiness, failure, disease, ill-health, pain, poor relationships, lack of success, stress, and depression are all caused by bad karma, and by the accretion of negative vibrations and energy which arise from our own negative thoughts as well as from our environment and the thoughts and actions of other humans. Negative energy and vibrations contaminate our chakras (energy centres in the body) and our auras – the aura being conceived as the invisible, subtle body that surrounds and sustains the physical body. According to PH, bad karma and negative energy can be dispelled or eliminated in this life by cleansing and purifying one's aura and re-energizing one's chakras, either through spiritual healing exercises or by imbibing positive energy and *pran shakti* (life force) through meditation and related spiritual practices.[18] In Shivyog, it is believed that the invocation of *sanjeevani shakti* (rejuvenating energy) through meditation helps to transmute and release bad karmas. Further, *sambhavi* or *siddha* meditation helps variously to connect the practitioner to high levels of energy, increase vibrations that pass through us, or generate heat to destroy negative energy and expel problems.[19]

According to BSG, the heart, the mind, the inner realm of life, and 'inner transformation in the depths of one's own being' are seen as the forces of 'dramatic shifts from evil to good or good to evil' (Ikeda 2007: 9–10). The Soka Gakkai teaching is to struggle against 'inner delusion and darkness', against greed, anger, jealousy, foolishness, and 'the negative and destructive forces within us' which 'cloud our Buddha nature' (ibid.: 6). If we complain and blame others and external environments and circumstances, we 'avoid the challenge of tackling our inner darkness and ignorance' and fail to improve or 'polish' our inner selves (ibid.: 44). The emphasis in BSG, then, is on enlightenment and change in our hearts and minds by spiritually 'polishing' ourselves through chants, prayer, meditation, and social service. As one practitioner put it, we make ourselves spiritually clean and pure so that divinity can come to reside in us and we can attain enlightenment. 'Buddhism means taking action: it means constantly striving', as Dr Ikeda writes (ibid.: 61).

Promise of success and prosperity

Internal cleansing, elevating the level of one's consciousness, and attaining union with the infinite in the above-mentioned ways, forge the right kind of empowered individual, akin to the enterprising subject, who can successfully attain mental and spiritual well-being, as well as prosperity and plenty. With cleansed auras and chakras, and the mind, body, and spirit in balance, right thoughts emerge, making it possible to take clear-headed, responsible decisions and make correct choices. Inner peace and fulfilment, as well as material success and abundance, are all within the easy reach of the spiritually-transformed individual.

BSG teaches that spiritual practice and chanting the key mantra activate the state of Buddhahood in one's life. Chanting enables 'us thoroughly to polish ourselves inside and *construct a life in which we win victory after victory*' (Ikeda 2007: 61, emphasis added). This, moreover, is argued to have relevance beyond the individual, and to have universal or collective significance, for 'a great inner revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and, further, will cause a change in the destiny of humankind'.[20] 'When we change, the world changes.… This is human revolution. We all have the power to change. When we realize this truth, we can bring forth that power anywhere, anytime, and in any situation' (ibid.: 51, 14).

Both PH and Shivyog claim that spiritual attainment empowers us to materialize or manifest our thoughts, desires, and wishes on the physical plane, and thus transform reality through the power of the mind. This is the spiritual power of 'goal manifestation' or the 'spiritual science of materializing abundance and prosperity'. PH calls this *kriyashakti*, which helps us to achieve practical and material goals like finding a lost key or earning higher returns on investment. Kriyashakti 'teaches you how to properly harness the power of your thoughts, subtle energies and your auric field to create a life of prosperity and success both materially as well as spiritually'. It is 'a powerful technique that allows you to

create the conditions that karmically entitle you to have your wishes fulfilled'.[21] At the PH demonstration, visitors were handed a list of problems that can be solved through PH, ranging from wrinkles, hair loss, and obesity to paralysis and stroke, as well as low salary, bad debts, and fraught relationships. In Shivyog, we are assured that the power of the mind or spiritual power can avert natural calamities, disasters, and human misfortune, not to mention our everyday problems.

Some spiritual organizations and gurus not only address mental well-being and worldly, material concerns but also directly engage with the question of money making and success in business. The PH Trust, for instance, promises a 'revolutionary approach' to successful management of one's life, finances, and business by using esoteric laws to bring about a sea change in one's attitudes. In their demonstration of the 'prosperity series' of training sessions, the presenter gave an example. He emphasized that material success and prosperity can be achieved by changing one's attitude to earning money by deploying PH's techniques. What prevents us from becoming rich is our negative outlook, which prompts us to believe that money is not for all to earn, that it does not grow on trees and so cannot be easily acquired, and that those who are rich must have either worked superhumanly hard, or had special prowess, talent, or simply luck, or had taken recourse to dishonesty. Moreover, we are afraid of losing money and so fail to take risks that might yield large profits from our investments. We also believe that money is the root cause of all evil and we are, therefore, fearful of engaging in the wholehearted and unrestrained pursuit of it. However, PH teaches the techniques, drawn from the spiritual practice of kriyashakti, to develop the deep conviction that money making is eminently possible, and that we can all potentially become rich if we surmount our mental barriers and inhibitions, and are emboldened to take risks and initiatives to do so. Once this mental leap is achieved, we can learn about creating 'entitlements' by performing certain virtuous actions and duties, thus, in turn, building 'channels' to make money flow toward our selves.[22] Here, the concepts of duty towards family and community and of social service, more broadly, are pressed into action to apply a moral veneer to the pursuit of material gain. This posits duty and service as a countervailing force against self-interest. Indeed, all varieties of NS emphasize a public commitment to peace and human values, as well as social service or contribution to one's community. However, these are understood in terms of self-fulfilment and the acquisition of personal merit, thus deploying the concept of civic virtue to help moralize individual material success. It also imputes a transactional relationship between performing public duty and reaping personal benefit.

The idea of material fulfilment is further reinforced through the creation of a sense of natural entitlement to success, prosperity, and happiness, as well as a firm belief in the possibility of achieving these through the sheer force of will and the energy of inner spirit. For instance, with images of natural plenitude that convey a sense of opulence, PH demonstrations suggest that we are all entitled to affluence. The PH session on kriyashakti starts with a short film showing

scenes of a lavish profusion of natural endowments, such as monumental tidal waves, fields heaving with blooming flowers and fruits, majestic mountain ranges vanishing into the distance, and the infinite and boundless sky; such scenes are followed by the legend 'Nature's bounty and abundance show us that our creator God envisaged a life of plenty and prosperity for all of us'; and 'Dream of a life of possibilities and not probabilities'. The entitlement to prosperity is here equated with natural laws and the divine order. Similarly, Shivananda asserts: 'Our life is a journey to move from limitations, scarcity and failures towards infinity, abundance and success; from disease towards holistic health; from finite individual consciousness to infinite Shiva consciousness.'[23] Here the quest of personal happiness, pleasure, success, and self-fulfilment is construed as a normative virtue and a valued goal, potentially within the reach of all. This can morally and ethically legitimize personal self-gratification and unbridled consumption, but more importantly it encourages an aspirational mindset by portraying prosperity as a divinely ordained, natural state of affairs within one's own grasp, if only one was to strive for it. Of course, such a mentality can just as well foster unrealistic goals and aspirations, and may, in fact, exacerbate a sense of unease, frustration, and discontent. However, NS also promises methods to mitigate these by emphasizing the possibility of establishing control over one's mental and psychological life, as seen above. NS provides self-generated and self-oriented practices to calm one's inner turmoil and cope with stress, thus spurring on practitioners to aspire and strive without the fear of adverse mental fallout. NS, then, valorizes the ethic of entrepreneurial success and affirms a sense of entitlement to prosperity, while at the same time purporting to offer effective tools for individuals to arm themselves with the power to turn aspiration into reality.

Conclusion: the enterprising self and spiritual mastery over one's destiny

In emphasizing the power lodged in the deepest inner recess of the soul and the mind, NS distinguishes between the inner self and the outward ego – the ego being the socially constructed entity or the socialized self that constrains us; it is the fettered self, made of ingrained emotions, memories, prejudices, and beliefs. As seen above, spiritualism purports to overcome the ego; it heals, purifies, and rejuvenates our 'stressed' social being and leads us into communion with pure, transcendental consciousness, as the source of positive energy and life force. Spiritualism, thus, empowers the individual to surmount social and cultural constraints and socially conditioned inhibitions, and to rise above debilitating 'attachments' and emotions. By overcoming the ego in this way, and by gaining the power to be in touch with our true inner selves, we can assert control over our destiny, the external environment, and our relationships. Self-knowledge, self-awareness, and unity with divine consciousness enable us to unleash new power and energy within ourselves. This gives us the strength to accept and adapt ourselves to reality and assume responsibility for our own lives, to rely on

our own inner strength to take initiative, to make appropriate choices, and to take positive action, and thus govern and manage our lives. The locus of control and agency shifts from external factors to the inner domain of the self: the mind, spiritual core, and the soul.

These notions not only have much in common with a wider international corpus of ideas on self-help and positive thinking, but evidently they also overlap with the concept of the enterprising self. Moreover, in discussing what she calls 'emotional capitalism', Eva Illouz (2008: 60–2) has commented on the reciprocity and mutual constitution of emotional and economic discourses. Emotional reflexivity is 'social competence writ large' and 'it has come to stand in for self-mastery, self-possession and moral autonomy, all marks of a properly groomed selfhood'. As such, emotional competence is a powerful asset in material activity, economic behaviour and self-pursuit. The value added in NS is that the tools and techniques of an emotionally self-regulated personhood are endowed with enhanced authority and augmented significance by invoking the concept of the higher soul or universal consciousness, and by referring to enduring ancient Indian spiritual traditions of soul-craft and culturally specific 'spiritual capital.' A description of PH's kriyashakti, for example, states that 'it is just not visualization and affirmation', referring to well-known positive-thinking concepts and practices. 'If these were the only requirements … most would have anything they want. The art and science of kriyashakti is learning *the secret ancient formula for precipitating thoughts into physical reality*' (emphasis added).[24] The spiritual messages of the organizations studied here do not only seek to provide tools for coping or succeeding. They also highlight some key qualities of an independent, self-responsible, active individual, who is free to choose and decide, and to make his or her own destiny. The effectiveness of spiritual practice in individual lives is fundamentally reliant on the production of this active, authorial self. In this way, the values of neoliberal enterprising conduct are cultivated in the realm of spiritualism and disseminated to a wider constituency of spiritual practitioners beyond the world of business.

While the construction of the person or self-hood in NS chimes with the key qualities of the enterprising self, NS also fortifies enterprise culture by creating and sustaining a myth of success and manufacturing the conceit of the indomitable power of the self. The contemporary craving in India for self-help and personality development tools suggests that the changes unleashed by globalization and economic liberalization have also engendered a sense of new opportunities to embrace as well as challenges or pressures to overcome. This has brought the individual to the forefront as the key actor and given rise to an impulse on the part of individuals to forge self-driven methods of both upward mobility and coping with new vulnerabilities and uncertainties. In this context, new spiritualism provides a uniquely indigenous and culturally familiar formula, sanctified by tradition, which enables practitioners to develop a sense of control and mastery over their lives and circumstances. Spiritual practices now emphasize the power of the self in an unprecedented way for a mass audience, invoking ancient religion to provide both authority and credibility to NS. Spiritual values are

portrayed as the magic bullet that can be easily deployed by every empowered individual. NS thus assembles the key ingredients of an aspirational enterprise culture by upholding a fanciful image of abundance and prosperity (as seen above) as well as by contriving the promise of universal success.

NS asserts that the divinely sanctified inner power of the self can be unleashed to establish control over one's destiny. As seen above, this is projected as 'easy', 'natural', and 'possible', as BKs put it. This offers to practitioners an extremely potent mode of gaining confidence and hope. At the same time, it encourages a construction of reality that attributes all achievement to the power of the mind and the spirit. Even if one does not always succeed in achieving one's desired goals, there is always the hope, and a sense of possibility, that the persistent cultivation and spiritual polishing of the self will eventually bring success and match reality with aspiration. The self thus becomes the sole protagonist. While this fuels an aspirational disposition, it also places the entire onus of success on individuals themselves and inculcates the notion that any form of external dependence or reliance is unnecessary, irrelevant, and even damaging and disempowering. Paradoxically, this may prompt a disengagement from socio-political reality, other than seeing it as an outcome or extension of one's own thoughts. More importantly, this can stimulate a self-centric, introspective, solipsistic view of reality and imply a denial of the importance of societal structures and relations in shaping people's lives. This mode of thinking is further reinforced by explicitly displacing an omnipotent God as the ruler of one's destiny, even though God is seen as the source of spiritual energy and divine love. By driving home the message that no one is responsible for us but ourselves, not even God, let alone lesser mortals, external forms of power are rendered invisible or irrelevant. This can potentially lead to a flawed identification and misrecognition of the nature and root of problems, and displace the diagnosis of problems from external factors back to one's own self, thus encouraging the tendency to seek solutions within oneself, through a micro-politics of self-making. While this may be a valuable asset from certain perspectives, such as gaining self-confidence and mental equanimity, the reliance on one's inner mental resources may engender a frame of mind that accepts and endures existing external conditions, ultimately contributing to complicity or accommodation with all features of extant society and culture – good or bad. Moreover, this redefines enterprise culture itself in highly personalized, psychologized, and internalized ways, and transfers the burden of societal risks and responsibilities on to individuals, consistent with neoliberalizing processes (Gordon 1991: 45; Introduction to this volume).

The symbiotic discursive relation between NS and the idea of enterprise, together with the celebration of the empowered self in NS, do not necessarily imply that NS has precipitated pervasive behavioural change and the universal adoption of enterprising conduct. Although the extensive popularity of NS may suggest a shift in that direction to some extent, the contention here is not that NS has remoulded Indians effectively into enterprising subjects. Instead, it is argued that the synergy between NS ideas and key elements of the public discourse on

enterprise has ideologically legitimized and sanctified the responsible, self-determined, self-managed, self-governed enterprising subject as both morally desirable and practically achievable. The neoliberalization of India entails the valorization of self-maximising entrepreneurial conduct (Introduction to this volume), while NS moralizes the ideals of self-determination and self-actualization, as well as providing tools and techniques to achieve these goals. NS has elaborated and added value to the idea of the enterprising self by investing it with a virtuous ethical and sacred dimension, as well as by propagating the notion that enterprising self-hood can be effectively practised by all in any walk of life. In this way, NS discursively contributes to a normative shift in favour of enterprise culture in wider society, beyond the compass of private corporate business. At the same time, the glorification of the spiritually empowered self, as the sole author of individual biographies, configures enterprise culture with a highly personalized and psychologized conception of agency, choice, and responsibility. Neoliberalism and late-modernity in the West have been associated with psychologization, in which social reality is reduced to questions of individual psychology, and in which an expert-based therapeutic culture offers technologies of self-regulation and self-management (Gordon 1991: 44; Rose 1998; Furedi 2004; de Vos 2008; Madsen and Brinkmann 2010). NS plays a critical role in furthering this psychologized therapeutic culture in India as a facet of enterprise culture by offering it to a mass audience, with the additional cachet of religious sanctity and spiritual expertise.

Notes

1 See www.aasthatv.co.in/, accessed 9 October 2012. For the importance of spiritual television channels and their growing viewership, see 'Tele-crusaders: spirituality on the box is attracting a growing viewership', *The Hindu*, 23 September 2005; 'TV viewers tuned in to piety too', *Business Line*, 21 January 2006; 'Count your blessings', *Outlook India*, 30 January 2006; 'Spiritual small screen', *Hindusthan Times*, 2 September 2012.

2 'Spirituality in everyday life', *Times of India*, 9 June 2011.

3 Swami Shivananda's lectures, televised on *Aastha* TV channel, are extensively available through Youtube. See also the Shivyog website www.shivyog.com, accessed 15 June 2012.

4 The account of PH in this chapter is based on PH demonstration sessions in Kolkata that I attended, and their promotional literature. See also www.pranichealing.co.in/; http://globalpranichealing.com/; and http://pranichealing.com/; www.pranichealing.org/, accessed 25 June 2012.

5 'Healing touch for mind and body', *Times of India*, 8 August 2010.

6 Website of Soka Gakkai: History of SGI, available online at: www.sgi.org/about-us/history-of-sgi/history-of-sgi.html, accessed 2 May 2012.

7 Interview with Soka Gakkai followers in Kolkata.

8 The following account is based on a number of episodes of 'Awakening with Brahma Kumaris' TV programmes, several of which are also available through Youtube; in particular, the series on 'Life Skills' (see www.omshantivideo.info/Life_Skills.html), and the programme on 'Self-Management, Taking Ownership of Choices' (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZShDUL8zHw0). All accessed 28 June 2012. See also BKs' website: www.bkwsu.org/index_html, accessed 2 July 2012.

9 TV programme: 'Positive Thinking' (see www.bkwsu.org/whatwedo/courses/positivethinking.htm), accessed 10 July 2012.
10 Episode on Karmic Accounts in the Personality Development series (www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4_Y_2ZNO4w), accessed 28 June 2012.
11 From promotional leaflets of the Pranic Healing Trust, West Bengal, and from lectures given by practitioners during free demonstration sessions in Kolkata.
12 Shivyog website, available online at: www.shivyog.com, accessed 15 June 2012.
13 TV programmes: Life Skills series (www.omshantivideo.info/Life_Skills.html).
14 TV programme: Karmic Accounts (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4_Y_2ZNO4w).
15 Soka Gakkai website: FAQ, available online at: www.sgi.org/buddhism/buddhism-faq.html, accessed 10 July 2012.
16 Advice of this nature runs through much of the Brahma Kumaris' TV programmes, but the quotations here come from various episodes of the Life Skills series: (see www.omshantivideo.info/Life_Skills.html).
17 TV programme: Karmic Accounts (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=V4_Y_2ZNO4w).
18 PH demonstration sessions in Kolkata.
19 Shivyog website; see www.shivyog.com.
20 BSG's promotional leaflet.
21 Pranic Healing website; see http://pranichealing.com.
22 Ibid.
23 Shivyog website; see www.shivyog.com.
24 Pranic Healing website; see http://pranichealing.com.

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Part II

Embedding enterprise culture in society

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5 Shrink-wrapped souls

Managing the self in India's new economy

Carol Upadhya

A key site where new entrepreneurial subjects are being produced in India is the rapidly expanding private sector, especially the software-outsourcing industry. India's approximately two million software engineers and other IT (information technology) workers are the essential resource base for this industry, which depends on contracts with customers located mostly in the advanced post-industrial economies of the West. Because software firms compete in a tough and volatile market, organizations and jobs alike are unstable and precarious, requiring flexible career and business strategies. In this context, software companies have attempted to fashion organizational cultures that are better adapted to a global market and to mould software engineers into entrepreneurial 'global professionals'. They have taken the lead in introducing what are sometimes called 'New Age' Human Resource Management (HRM) systems into India, a set of ideas and practices that represent a significant break from the bureaucratic and top-down management culture of the large public-sector undertakings set up under the Nehruvian planned economy. In contrast to a pattern of lifetime employment and strong trade unions (representing even white-collar workers) which imparted a sense of collective identity, IT companies foster a culture of individualism through hire-and-fire policies and a competitive work environment, and by expecting workers to be self-driven and self-managing. This new management regime may be seen as a strategy by companies to deflect responsibility for competitiveness and profitability onto individual employees.

This chapter examines the managerial techniques, especially 'soft skills' training, employed by software companies in Bangalore to produce enterprising 'global professionals'. These practices have a wider significance, for the dispositions and values that are imparted through training programmes resonate with a new 'spirit of capitalism' that is circulating widely in contemporary India, promoted by self-help books, personality-development courses, spiritual teachers, and popular media. Although soft-skills training largely replicates North American models, trainers increasingly draw on 'Hindu' religious or spiritual ideas in order to produce a specifically Indian version of 'enterprise culture'. This trend in turn merges with the flowering of new 'spiritual' organizations in urban India, which attract many among the 'new middle classes', including software professionals.

The first section of the chapter describes the soft-skills training programmes observed in Bangalore software companies and the emergence of an ancillary industry of consultants who cater to the corporate demand for such training. The second section examines the incorporation of spiritual ideas and religious texts into corporate management and training. In the third section these developments are linked to the popularity among software engineers of self-improvement techniques and new spiritualities. I argue that IT professionals are not simply 'produced' as neoliberal subjects by these technologies of subjectification, but that instead they may creatively appropriate and rework them in their effort to negotiate their sense of self and identity in an insecure and rapidly changing social world.

Making software engineers entrepreneurial

Since the 1980s, the modern corporation has been radically restructured, from the bureaucratic model of Fordism, with its top-down management systems, towards 'flatter' and more flexible organizational structures supported by 'soft' management techniques. The 'new workplace' is supposed to 'empower' rather than regulate workers and encourage individual initiative and self-responsibility in order to enhance productivity. 'New Age management' had its beginnings in Silicon Valley's informal but high-pressure work culture, but it has been mainstreamed as standard management wisdom. This management philosophy hinges on the idea of the 'entrepreneurial' worker, one who is autonomous and self-directed. To manage the entrepreneurial 'knowledge worker', 'subjective' techniques of control (Ray and Sayer 1999) have been developed by drawing extensively on psychology, such that the world of work has become 'a zone that is as much psychological as economic' (Rose 1999: 91).

Most managers and employees whom my colleagues and I interviewed in Bangalore software companies described their workplaces in ways that mirrored this model. According to informants, their organizations have 'flat' structures, flexible management practices, and open and informal work cultures. They explicitly contrasted the management style in the IT industry with India's 'old economy' (mainly public-sector) organizations, which they characterized as hierarchical, bureaucratic, and non-enterprising. But, according to many HR managers, Indian software engineers are not well equipped to function in this new work environment because of their culturally ingrained habits of subservience and passivity. The most common complaint, voiced by both managers and foreign clients, was that Indian IT professionals are not sufficiently 'proactive' – that they need continual direction, supervision, and feedback – in contrast to American or European engineers, who are supposed to be more autonomous and self-managing. A second major problem that was cited was their poor communications skills. It is these 'lacks' that soft-skills training workshops are designed to correct.

Software companies are especially motivated to mandate extensive soft-skills training for their employees because of their reliance on contracts with customers outside India (mostly in the West). Software engineers need to be able to

work in a 'global' corporate environment, communicate effectively with customers and co-workers both in India and abroad, and fit themselves into the mould of the 'global professional'. Because employees are seen as dependent and passive, IT firms devote substantial resources to imparting the appropriate social and communication skills. Soft-skills training programmes aim to transform them into more effective employees by working on their personalities, interpersonal skills, behavioural and communication styles, and cultural orientations, and by helping them to become aware of their own attitudes and interactional styles so that they can reflexively change the way in which they function in the workplace.

Soft-skills training had its origins in the USA, and is closely linked with the American self-help movement, which promotes a constant quest for self-improvement through self-realization (M. Brown 2003), as well as with New Age spiritual movements (Heelas 1996). According to Urciuoli, the notion of the worker-self as a 'bundle of skills' is a 'vivid manifestation of the neoliberal imaginary' (Urciuoli 2008: 212). Skills are re-imagined as ways to fashion new subjectivities in line with the new economy, 'making one rethink and transform one's self to best fit one's job' (ibid.: 215). The techniques used by soft-skills trainers draw heavily on psychological expertise, reinforcing the image of a coherent, bounded, individualized, and intentional self that has come to dominate Western culture (Rose 1998: 3–4). The notion of the 'autonomous individual striving for self-realisation' (Rose 1999: 90) also circulates through popular management and psychology books, success coaching programmes, and a range of self-actualization practices. Soft-skills trainers offer to help employees to maximize their performance and to succeed in a competitive business environment, emphasizing the need to manage one's own career by building up one's 'skill sets'. These ideas of the self, work, and self-improvement have circulated far beyond the West, especially (but not only) through the globalization of HRM.

We encountered a range of soft-skills training programmes in Bangalore software firms, from 'effective communication', leadership skills, and team-working to performance management, 'interpersonal effectiveness', assertiveness training, time management, emotional intelligence, and cross-cultural communication.[1] As in the USA, the most common soft skills that are promoted in IT companies are communication skills, teamwork, and leadership, with the important addition of cultural sensitivity training. In addition, other types of training programme are organized to redress specific deficiencies or needs. For example, in response to customer feedback that Indian software engineers are not sufficiently proactive, they teach 'assertive communication skills', while engineers' (alleged) inability to keep to production schedules is met by time-management workshops. The emphasis on interactional and communication skills suggests that the fashioning of entrepreneurial workers requires more than the psychological re-engineering of their 'souls' (Rose 1989). Instead, the production of sociality too has become crucial to the generation of value, especially in service industries. As Hardt and Negri (2000) argue, 'immaterial' or 'affective' labour has become the hegemonic form of work in the post-industrial

economy, central to which are practices of sociality and communication. Only by creating particular kinds of social relations within the workplace can the conditions of production be ensured, which means that social practices both within and beyond the workplace are implicated in the generation of value (Böhm and Land 2012: 225).

Most large- and medium-size software companies have the in-house training facilities and expertise to provide soft-skills training, but many firms outsource this requirement to local experts. A number of independent consultancy firms have cropped up in Bangalore and other major cities of India to cater to this growing demand. They offer a broad range of management consultancy services as well as soft-skills training. A trawl through the internet reveals a similarity in language, philosophy, and goals across these firms, and the content of their websites is largely the same as that of US websites. Indian HR consultants appear to simply reproduce contemporary management lingo and advice, with individual variations emerging from the specific psychological frameworks employed or types of programme offered. The main marketing pitch is that companies need to invest in 'their' people if they want to succeed in today's competitive market, and companies are urged to use their expert services to bring out the full potential of their employees and create a satisfied and productive workforce:

> We consider the biggest challenge organisations face is to create work environments and methods that allow individuals and teams to contribute and express their potential.… Sustainable growth and profitability in organisations depend on engaging and retaining people, which lie in the relationships people develop at work.[2]

These firms offer to 'help individuals and companies enhance personal effectiveness and productivity', 'help your people at all levels to think and interact better with energy and passion',[3] and 'help businesses raise employee productivity and performance and significantly add value and agility through an efficient workforce'.[4] Course titles such as 'High Productivity', 'People Empowerment', 'How to Accomplish Goals and Priorities', 'Manage Stress and Emotions', and 'Personal Excellence' pepper these websites.[5] Another firm offers courses in 'Embracing Change', 'Translating Vision to Reality', 'Generating Momentum through Motivation', and 'Learning to Say NO'.[6] The blurb for a course on communication and interpersonal skills reads:

> Finally, what we are all looking for is: *How do I work with people such that they are inspired and empowered?* The workshop is about a core shift in one's relationship with life that does not require any change of circumstances, feelings or issues, but rather an alteration of the context in which those circumstances or issues are held. The workshop reveals people's ability to perform beyond what they thought was possible and empowers their intention to accomplish what they are committed to accomplishing professionally and personally.[7]

A range of psychological theories and behaviour-modification techniques, from Transactional Analysis (TA) and the Myers-Briggs Personality Type Indicator® to Neuro-linguistic Programming™, are pressed into service to inculcate desirable personal attributes such as 'assertiveness' and 'self-confidence'. The personalities of trainees are analysed and categorized to help them to understand themselves and their relationships at work, while psychometric testing is used to transform them into goal-oriented, effective, and self-fulfilled individuals. In line with the current popularity in India of self-actualization organizations, life skills programmes, and success coaches, trainers assure participants that they will help them to discover and develop their inner selves. A TA trainer explained it this way:

> If you don't have the soft skills, [if you are not] tinkering with your inner self, [working on] how to improve your quality of life outside work.… [Because] it's no longer enough for me to be a good techie. I cannot be a good leader without good people skills.… And in order to improve my people-skills I need to understand what kind of person *I* am…
>
> (Sathaye 2008: 149)

The trainer in a communication-skills workshop told participants:

> This will improve your competence as a software engineer. You may feel that you should focus on technical skills, but a few years down the line, when you become a team leader, you will have to know how to manage people, and it's not something you can learn overnight. If you haven't been practising your people skills all along, you won't be able to manage. And the most important skill for managers is communication, because you need to understand the customer's requirements and to be able to communicate effectively with team members or give positive feedback.

Soft-skills training programmes that we observed in Bangalore similarly reproduced standard US models, modified to address what are seen as specific problems of Indian software engineers. Below is a brief excerpt from a communication-skills workshop that illustrates the notions of the self and desirable behaviour patterns that are promoted through such training.

Finding a personality

At a two-day communication-skills programme for employees of the Bangalore subsidiary of Sun Microsystems, the trainer Sinead (a young Irish woman working for CreamWorks Solutions),[8] ran an exercise to demonstrate that different personality types have different communication styles. She sought to convey the idea that if you understand your own personality type and those of your co-workers, you will be better equipped to manage relationships at work. She first made the trainees take a test to determine their personality types, then split them

into groups based on this categorization and asked them to make presentations on 'their' communication style and how it affects team dynamics. The participants were sorted into four personality types, with the following characteristics:

1 'perfect': idealistic; analytical; serious and purposeful; organized; neat and tidy; perfectionist; persistent and thorough; finds creative solutions;
2 'popular': appealing personality; talkative; curious; enthusiastic and energetic; expressive; makes friends easily; thinks up new activities; convinces others to work;
3 'powerful': born leader; dynamic and active; goal-oriented; organizes well; delegates work; thrives on opposition; stimulates activity; must correct wrongs;
4 'peaceful': low-key personality; easy-going; calm, cool, and collected; patient; mediates problems; good administrative ability; competent and steady; good listener.

The groups outlined the positive and negative aspects of 'their' personality types, drawing on examples from their everyday work experiences. The 'perfects' agreed that they were good at analysing and working out problems within the team and said that they brought 'positive energy' to the group, but their negative feature was that they try to impose their own ways of doing things on others. In the ensuing discussion, other participants agreed with this characterization, accusing the 'perfects' of being too domineering. The 'populars' said that they helped to cement the team together and that they could 'sell our solution' to others, but they lacked precision and spent too much time talking and not enough on focused work. The presentation by the 'powerful' group gave rise to the most animated discussion. They said that they were doers, not talkers; that they knew how to get things done and how to delegate work. A debate followed about whether the 'powerful' personality leads through consensus or by imposing his or her will. The 'powerfuls' argued that every team needs a manager/leader who will take decisions, and that if there is 'too much democracy' nothing gets done. A participant took offence at this remark, saying that if the team leader or manager were too aggressive he would just quit his job. At this point, Sinead intervened to say that in this 'capitalist, competitive society', the dominant values are those of the 'powerful type'. The participants asked her which personality type is most likely to be successful, to which she said that the 'powerfuls' and the 'populars' are more likely to move up the corporate ladder, because in the corporate world 'style matters over substance'.

This exercise conveyed multiple messages: on one level, participants were asked to recognize their own personality types and understand how this influences their ability to function in a team, but they were also told that only certain interactional styles will bring success. Sinead felt that the exercise worked well because it forced the participants to think about their behaviour patterns in a new way and induced them to acknowledge tensions within the team. But several participants later revealed a cynical attitude towards such programmes. Many

participate only because they are required to do so by their managers, or because they think it will help their career development. Several older engineers said that when they were 'freshers' (new employees) they would attend training sessions with enthusiasm, but now they regard them as a necessary evil to enhance their performance ratings, or else as a comfortable 'time-pass' when they are 'on the bench' (not currently assigned to a project). Some informants were openly critical of the ideas expressed by trainers, especially the assumptions about 'Indian' and 'Western' personality types or cultures that are retailed in these courses (Upadhya 2008). For example, on another occasion a trainee questioned the premise of the workshop itself: 'They say Indians have poor communication skills but actually Indians are traditionally talkers – so…?' The response: 'We can talk but not the way we should' (quoted in Sathaye 2008: 152). This sense of dissonance – voiced by consultants, and HR managers, as well as participants – has opened up a space for the crafting of an 'indigenous' version of soft-skills training. A new breed of management guru has appeared on the scene, who is attempting to make entrepreneurialism and associated techniques of self-fashioning more palatable to Indian managers and employees by reframing management discourse through Hindu religious idioms (see the following section).

Although employees are often sceptical about the benefits of soft-skills training, many attempt to implement at least some of the practices and ideas that are taught. In fact, it would be difficult to function in the corporate set-up or to understand the dominant discourses that frame the social environment without some familiarity with current management ideology. Moreover, communication and interpersonal skills, 'EQ' (emotional quotient) training, and the like are presented as knowledge that will not only enhance career prospects but also lead to a more fulfilled personal life. Indeed, as discussed further below, many software engineers participate in similar self-improvement or self-actualization programmes outside their workplaces. At the same time, it cannot be said that soft-skills training simply 'produces' the desired type of worker-subject. Instead, employees may engage with these pedagogical practices in creative ways, replicating particular techniques which help them to manage their teams, get along with colleagues, or impress their bosses, while ignoring or ridiculing others.

Putting spirituality to work

Contemporary management theory in the West draws on 'new spiritual movements' (Heelas 1996), which in turn are densely cross-connected with self-help and self-actualization practices. The ultimate expression of this trend is the workplace spirituality movement, in which organizations introduce programmes and institutional arrangements to promote spiritual and religious practices in the workplace in order to alleviate employee frustration and create a sense of identity (Zaidman *et al.* 2009). Driven mainly by New Age professionals (Heelas 1992), workplace spirituality uses religious technologies such as the retreat and the confessional to act on the psyches and values of employees, reconstituting the relationship between self and organization and reconciling spiritual and

economic aims. Like New Age philosophy, the discourse of workplace spirituality assumes that there is an inner or essential self whose potential must be released and enabled by the organization (Bell and Taylor 2003).

Outside the West as well, spiritual or religious traditions are increasingly deployed to reshape working subjects, especially in response to neoliberal economic reforms. An excellent study of this trend is Rudnyckyj's (2009, 2010) ethnography of the 'Emotional Spiritual Quotient' (ESQ) movement in Indonesia. In this case, spiritual reformers combine Islamic beliefs with management principles to enhance the competitiveness of employees of public-sector enterprises that are undergoing privatization. ESQ training sessions use intensive indoctrination techniques to impart an ethic of self-management and to convey the message that that adherence to Islamic principles will bring worldly success: 'Treating work as a form of worship involves cultivating an ethics of individual accountability that is latent in both Islam and neoliberalism' (Rudnyckyj 2010: 146). ESQ seeks to 'simultaneously transform workers into more pious religious subjects and more productive economic subjects' (Rudnyckyj 2009: 106). This movement is quite different from American workplace spirituality in that it is more oriented to the collective and promotes religious purity and a Protestant-type work ethic, but in both cases we see spiritual/religious technologies being employed for the production of new kinds of worker.

Rudnyckyj uses the term 'spiritual economies' to refer to how 'spirituality is produced as an object of self-management and intervention to instil economic reason' (2010: 131, fn 1). Similarly, in India, spirituality in management is being promoted by religious leaders, management consultants, and even professional academics,[9] who are reinventing management science by translating concepts through Hindu cultural categories and ideas. Self-made management gurus extend and modify HR practices and self-help ideas by putting their own spin on Indian religious traditions, identifying points of relevance for corporate managers and aspirational employees. India's long-standing traditions of cultivation of the psyche, spirit, and body are appropriated in the service of increased productivity and efficiency at work: yoga is reinvented as a stress-relief technique, the Bhagavad Gita invoked as an inspirational management text. This development is related to the flowering of myriad new religious and spiritual organizations in India's major cities, whose gurus purvey easily digestible spiritual lessons and meditation techniques to ease the angst of the disaffected and time-constrained urban middle classes. These organizations, such as the Art of Living (AOL) founded by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, represent a new phase in the corporatization of Indian spirituality.

AOL, which is based in Bangalore but has many centres across India and abroad, offers a unique set of packaged spiritual concepts and techniques. Although it caters to the affluent and middle classes generally, AOL also designs training programmes specifically for corporate requirements. Moreover, it organizes an annual event on 'spirituality and corporate life' at the Bangalore ashram. The quick-fix, do-it-yourself approach of AOL is well suited to corporate clients as well as middle-class professionals, who have limited time to engage in more

arduous spiritual pursuits. While AOL is perhaps the most visible of them, a number of new spiritual movements, as well as more secular organizations offering self-improvement courses and counselling, have appeared since the 1980s. The boundary between religious/spiritual organizations and the more 'secular' self-help and 'positive thinking' movements is quite fuzzy, in terms of both the kinds of adherent whom they attract and the philosophies and techniques that they teach. Several scholars have argued that this development reflects the rise of the globalized 'new middle classes' as well as the formation of an affluent transnational Indian public (Srinivas 2008; Warrier 2005). In this 'dense religious supermarket with its global networks' (Warrier 2003: 248), individuals are free to choose among various offerings. Warrier suggests that this freedom partly explains their attraction: rather than submitting to the authority of the guru, followers are allowed to construct a 'personal and individualized religious world in accordance with his or her needs and preferences' (ibid.: 248).

Although New Age management philosophies have flourished mainly in the West, Indian gurus are making inroads into the corporate market for soft skills. A range of religious organizations and swamis have jumped onto this bandwagon, creating specialized courses and techniques to address contemporary management concerns: how to motivate workers, create effective leaders, maximize productivity, and relieve stress. Catering to the rising demand for soft-skills training, New Age organizations and self-styled guru-consultants have created a whole new segment of the business-services economy, as indicated by the flood of popular books with titles such as *The Gita and Management* (Bodhananda 2004a) and executive-training courses such as *Integrating Spirituality with Organisational Leadership*. These offerings mix management science with Hindu spiritual concepts or Puranic literature to forge what is presented as a more culturally appropriate management philosophy. An internet search reveals numerous organizations, consultants, websites, and texts that draw on the Bhagavad Gita, the Vedas, and other sources of 'ancient wisdom' in their management and training services. Several organizations have even engaged full-time 'Corporate Gurus' to impart spiritual lessons to their employees. This trend is exemplified below by two examples of spiritual leaders who impart management advice and soft-skills training.

A new management guru

Swami Bodhananda is a teacher of Vedanta and meditation who has successfully transformed himself into a management guru with a substantial following in India and abroad.[10] His activities are confined primarily to lectures and discourses rather than training programmes, and he is a popular speaker on the business-school lecture circuit. His discourses suggest that he has unhesitatingly embraced the ideology of liberalization, which, according to him, has freed Indians to pursue their hidden potential, and he dispenses advice to managers and employees about how to succeed in the new economy. In the context of liberalization, Bodhananda avers, the individual has become all-important, and the

ability of individuals to make intelligent decisions will determine India's future. As the economy grows, it needs a management science that is culturally grounded. He draws especially on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, 'which are excellent studies of the human mind caught in the ethical and moral dilemmas of the world of business, politics, [etc.]' (Bodhananda 2004a: xii). Bodhananda addresses the same issues that dominate soft-skills discourses, recast in what he portrays as the language of ancient Indian thought. For example, *The Gita and Management* (Bodhananda 2004a) includes essays on 'Effective Communication', 'Goals, 'The Vedantic Ethos in Personality Development', 'Innovativeness, Effectiveness and Competitiveness', as well as 'Management Lessons from Patanjali's Yoga Sutras' and 'Spiritual Dimensions in Modern Management'. In his *Indian Management and Leadership; Spiritual and Ethical Values for Corporate and Personal Success* (2007), we find lectures on 'Spirituality in the Workplace', 'Personality Re-engineering', 'Work Culture and Team Building', and 'Leadership Lessons from Indian Mythology'.

Bodhananda goes beyond management concerns to develop a specifically Indian theory of mind. Management science has attempted (but failed) to understand individual thought and behaviour, but Vedanta provides a valid theory of the individual, which will help managers to make decisions (Bodhananda 2004a: 5–9). He proposes a kind of personality testing based on Hindu concepts, categorizing personalities according to the three elemental *gunas* ('Guna Analysis'). Each individual is a combination of the three types of 'energy' described in the classic texts – *sattva*, *rajas*, and *tamas* – and this combination determines one's *dharma* and therefore what type of work is best suited to that individual. For example, the *sattvic* person should work in R&D (research and development), because he or she has the kind of energy that creates knowledge; such an individual will not perform well as a manager, who requires *rajas* or 'activity, power, organisation' (2004a: 11). 'One has to look into oneself and decide to which category one belongs and also into what are the organizational requirements … and accordingly one has to develop skills' (2004a: 12). Further:

> Developing the personality means giving a person the appropriate training and putting him in an appropriate job. Thus one has to discover not only that one is a natural worker, one has to also work according to one's nature, or *dharma*.
>
> (2004a: 13)

Thus, his ideas clearly replicate the psychological approach of standard HRM and soft-skills training, especially the categorization of personalities, albeit couched in a different idiom.

The book that comes closest to popular management books is *The Seven Hindu Spiritual Laws of Success* (Bodhananda 2004b), which clearly cannibalizes Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989). The seven 'laws' include The Law of Brahman ('Every individual is a field of infinite potentiality seeking "self" expression'); the Law of Maya ('Change and the spirit of flow');

The Law of Dharma ('Every individual is unique, having different talents and needs. Talents are to be expressed and needs are to be fulfilled within the limits of Universal Dharma'); The Law of Karma ('Individuals create their destiny by their choices and actions'); and so on. As in the case of ESQ, which invokes timeless Islamic principles, Bodhananda presents these laws as 'moral and ethical laws that govern inter-personal relationships'. These laws provide the 'Seven Steps to Self-Actualisation' (ibid.: 224), which will lead to happiness and self-fulfilment.

Spiritual technologies of the self

My second example is drawn from a long interview with a self-made guru who has a thriving consultancy business in corporate training. I was put in touch with Rustom by the HR manager of a large IT company, which had hired him to run a stress management workshop. Rustom (not his real name) is a fifty-ish Parsi man, rather portly and balding but still sporting a ponytail, dressed in a white guru-type outfit – a long kurta with big shiny buttons and pyjama trousers. Apart from his dress and appearance, his mannerisms and speech suggested that he has consciously cultivated the guru image: he spoke in English in a calm and focused manner, with no excess words and plenty of direct eye contact, and with a Bombay upper-crust accent.

In answer to my questions about his corporate training work, Rustom recounted his unusual career. He had spent 35 years in the corporate world, mainly in advertising, working in the USA and UK as well as in India. While leading a typically hectic corporate life, he became interested in spiritual practices. He claims to have been initiated into a range of spiritual systems, from Sufism to Zen, settling finally into the Bihar School of Yoga, in which he studied with a guru for several years. When he finally took *sanyas*, his guru gave him a mission: to 'help people to live a happier life'. Rustom believes that this career, together with his ventures in spirituality, gives him a 'unique ability to speak to people in the corporate world'. His organization conducts workshops for companies and other groups, using a system that he developed himself, which draws on a range of 'spiritual discipline practices derived from Sufism, Zen, Tao, Tai Chi, and Tantric texts as well as modern techniques taken from the Tavistock Institute'. He also incorporates techniques to bring out the creativity in individuals that he developed while working in the advertising industry. Rustom markets his workshops as stress-management programmes, but he says that his work is much more profound – that he imparts 'tools and techniques to energise the mind and the body, strengthen and stabilise the emotions, and to help people to live better and happier lives'. His goal is to help the participants 'to blossom as human beings' rather than merely to 'de-stress' them. Stress, he said, 'comes from not fulfilling your inner self', and if you become a 'full human being' you will not have stress.

Rustom's workshops are intensive, two-day residential affairs, and his clients include a range of corporate houses, but especially software companies. In his

view, software engineers are 'introverted' and 'poor communicators' because 'they only stare at a machine all day'. Like many soft-skills trainers, he is highly critical of the IT industry: he avers that IT jobs are 'mono-jobs', that success comes from working not with people but with the machine, that the work environment is 'completely dehumanised': 'They don't treat their people like people but like a number, or a machine.' For this reason, software engineers are socially maladjusted, they not good at dealing with their colleagues or anyone else, nor are they able to handle their own problems. They are 'confused and troubled', they have problems with their families and other interpersonal relationships, they are 'uncomfortable people' who 'tend to spread discomfort around them'. His workshops help them to open up and reach out to others. However, they are not 'easy targets' for his kind of training because they have 'set minds', they are scientific and rational in outlook. Most come to his workshops with a cynical mindset because they have attended so many training sessions; they think of training as just a 'good excuse to get away from the office and have a picnic'. Rustom's strategy to overcome this scepticism is to first teach them techniques to 'make them feel good', after which they begin to enjoy the workshop and believe that he has something to offer. Rustom described what he does as 'psychic surgery', and asserted that participants have told him that the workshops have indeed brought about a change in them.

Rustom's views on the personal and emotional problems of software engineers were echoed by many other trainers, psychologists, and consultants whom we interviewed. Similar representations also circulate widely in the media – stories about high rates of divorce and suicide among IT professionals due to stress and long working hours – which have encouraged the mushrooming of consultancy services offering counselling, behaviour modification, and stress-management techniques. Enterprising psychologists, life skills trainers, and spiritual leaders have been quick to seize the opportunity offered by the corporate demand for soft skills, as well as the search by middle-class individuals for relief from stress, emotional problems, and a general sense of personal dislocation. Software professionals, too, often articulate the same narratives about their emotional and social inadequacies and disembedded lives, which may account for their interest in self-actualization and spiritual practices. The final section of this chapter briefly discusses the popularity of new spiritual movements among the urban middle and affluent classes in India, of which IT professionals form a significant section.

The new spirit(s) of capitalism

The growing popularity in India of self-help books, personality-development courses, and new spiritual and religious movements points to a wider cultural shift in which middle-class subjects embrace practices of self-fashioning and self-fulfilment. For example, software professionals are a very visible segment of participants in new spiritual organizations such as the Art of Living (AOL), as well as self-actualization programmes such as those offered by Landmark

Forum. These organizations offer slickly marketed packages of spiritual wisdom or self-improvement techniques that claim to provide a quick route to personal fulfilment, psychological release, or success, and simple but 'scientific' methods to cope with stress, anxiety, or burnout.[11] They are premised on the notion of the self as an autonomous entity (Rose 1998, 1999), one that is reflexively engaged in constructing its own path to spiritual salvation or personal achievement. Organizations such as AOL and Sri Satya Sai Baba Mission share certain other features that set them apart from more traditional religious sects, such as the claim to be 'scientific' – which may make them particularly appealing to software engineers.[12] Also, unlike ancient and medieval Hindu movements, they do not advocate renunciation of the world: gurus such as Sri Sri Ravi Shankar and Swami Bodhananda teach that it is perfectly acceptable to pursue spiritual enlightenment while accumulating material wealth. Another significant feature is their emphasis on self-care and self-responsibility through yoga, *pranayama*, meditation, and appropriate diet. The organizations themselves mimic corporate houses in their organization and functioning, perhaps providing a sense of familiarity to their professional devotees.

Sanjay, a senior software engineer with a German company in Bangalore, explained why he became very active in the Art of Living, in which he is a 'Zonal Co-ordinator':

> I was constantly comparing myself with my peers. One of my friends who came back from the US built a house here while I was still struggling to save money for buying a flat. He was such a dumb guy at college. Such comparisons used to mire my thoughts. There is also pressure for performance. People are guarded in the IT industry. Normally they don't interact much. Most people here are not happy with their professions. All these things built up my tension. Now I am better because of AOL.

After joining the IT industry Sanjay experienced a 'tough phase' due to stress, but after he was introduced to the Art of Living, his life was turned around:

> There is lot of emphasis on self development. Conventional practices and *yogasanas* require lot of time to learn. Sudarshan Kriya [the meditation and breathing practice taught by AOL] is very easy to practise. If you do Sudarshan Kriya, you feel tremendously refreshed. What others do in one day, I will do in half a day.

Explaining why IT professionals in particular are attracted to AOL, he said: 'IT people tend to get frustrated by monotonous things. They constantly feel that there is no creativity. But after AOL, I don't feel frustrated.'

Why do many software engineers join organizations such as AOL, follow spiritual leaders such as Mata Amritanandamayi, or engage intensively with yoga practice or other forms of self-exploration and self-fashioning? Sanjay's narrative seems to confirm the ubiquitous image of software engineers as

frustrated, stressed, maladjusted, and alienated. A superficial explanation would point to their sense of instability due to rapidly changing lifestyles and frequent geographical mobility, lack of job security, and the high levels of stress and frustration that they experience at work. The new spiritual movements give psychological release and impart specific techniques for coping with tension and disorientation. However, this psychological explanation merely reiterates the popular narratives about IT professionals that are articulated by stress-management consultants and counsellors. Another explanation is that these movements are attractive to the urban middle classes in general because they provide relatively easy access to traditional religious knowledge, which many people feel is getting lost in the winds of modern change (Fuller and Harriss 2005: 229). However, Warrier (2003) critiques this 'social anxiety' thesis, arguing instead that their popularity is linked to the new consumer culture in which social identity and status are constructed through consumption. She suggests that the turn towards spirituality should be understood not as a reaction to the dislocations of modern life, but as a creative strategy of self-fashioning. Another perspective is offered by Amrute, who points to an 'overlap between the logic of the code that IT-ers write during the weekday and the religion that they practice outside of work' (2010: 541). At the same time, the religious practices of IT professionals living abroad provide a space for seeking self-determination in the face of their sense of estrangement (ibid.: 547). Indeed, the software engineers whom we encountered often expressed a sense of unease and displacement that is framed as a loss of cultural authenticity, engendered by their stressful, hectic, and mobile working lives.

All these arguments are compelling yet remain partial, and I do not attempt to offer an alternative here. The connection between the advent of the 'new economy' and the mushrooming of new forms of spirituality and practices of self-fashioning is clearly indirect and multilayered. My objective in this chapter is merely to point out that the kinds of self-actualization and religious experience that many IT professionals embrace are not very different from the forms of subjectification that they undergo in the workplace. Through participation in these activities, they may be trying to construct an autonomous yet culturally grounded self; one that is not just the corporatized 'entrepreneurial' and 'global' self required by IT companies, emptied of cultural content, but that draws on 'traditional' social identities and religious beliefs.

New subjects of neoliberalism?

In this chapter I have argued that software organizations in India strive to produce entrepreneurial worker-subjects through soft-skills training and other 'New Age' management practices. However, one cannot draw a straightforward link between these managerial practices and the forging of new economic subjects. In the case of the Indian software industry, the model of the entrepreneurial worker seems particularly difficult to implant, despite the heavy investment by Indian software companies in fostering a 'global' work culture. On the

surface, many IT professionals appear to have embraced the goals of individualized achievement and personal growth that are retailed by soft-skills trainers and management gurus. Yet their narratives reveal a more complex reality, one of friction between the manufactured culture of the 'new workplace' and a very different social context beyond work in which they continue to dwell. Engulfed by workplace demands that require them to reinvent themselves, many turn to alternative avenues of social engagement and self-exploration, trying to locate their 'true' selves through involvement in self-help or spiritual movements that appear to offer 'meaning' as well as techniques for coping with everyday life – practices that in the end seem to reinforce the new 'regime of the self' that is creating their sense of alienation in the first place.

While the ideas retailed by soft-skills training programmes and spirituality-in-management texts clearly resonate with the new 'spirit of capitalism' that has swept through contemporary India, they also provide a means for individuals who are entangled in the uncertainties and dislocations of the new economy to 're-engineer' their own souls. By appropriating modern self-help practices in the form of reconstituted spiritual techniques of self-discipline and self-knowledge, and by critically and selectively engaging with the idea of the entrepreneurial self, IT workers attempt to gain some control over their lives in an ever-shifting world.

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Notes

1 For obvious reasons, cross-cultural or 'cultural sensitivity' training is a major thrust of soft-skills programmes in IT companies (Upadhya 2008).
2 See http://usetimeindia.com/html/in_company.html, accessed 30 July 2011.
3 See http://usetimeindia.com/html/cem.html, accessed 30 July 2011.
4 See http://softskillscoordinates.web.officelive.com/CorporateTraining.aspx, accessed 30 July 2011.
5 See http://usetimeindia.com/html/cem.html, accessed 30 July 2011.

6 See http://softskillscoordinates.web.officelive.com/CorporateTraining.aspx, accessed 30 July 2011.
7 See http://usetimeindia.com/html/cem.html, accessed 30 July 2011.
8 In this section I use the real names of the consultancy firm, the software organization where the training took place (Sun Microsystems), and the trainer, because we had permission from both companies to film their workshops and to circulate the film. Scenes from CreamWork's communication workshops are described in Sathaye (2008) and depicted in the ethnographic film entitled 'Fun@Sun: making of a global workplace', which is part of the film series *Coding Culture: Bangalore's Software Industry*, by Gautam Sonti in collaboration with Carol Upadhya (National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, 2006). CreamWorks Solutions was founded by an Irish expat, Vicki Nicholson, who brings young Irish men and women to India for one-to-two year stints to work as trainers. This is unusual in Bangalore, where most soft-skills training and management consultancy firms are owned and staffed by Indians.
9 Prominent among them is Ramnath Narayanswamy, professor at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore (IIMB), who has been writing on Hinduism, spirituality, and management for a long time. The organization of a conference of the International Association of Management, Spirituality & Religion at IIMB in January 2012 on 'The Spiritual Challenge in Management', points to a growing convergence between the workplace spirituality movement and current management trends in India.
10 See www.sambodh.com/swami.html, accessed 14 July 2013.
11 The role of religion and spiritual practices in the formation of the self is a long-standing subject of anthropological interest in South Asia, yet there has been relatively little scholarly work on the new spiritual/religious movements, nor on the explosion of New Age type practices in India such as *reiki* and *vastu*. See Fuller and Harriss (2005).
12 The invocation of science to authorize Hindu systems of thought has deep colonial roots (Prakash 2000), but the ways in which 'science' and 'spirituality' are promiscuously mated, but also debated, today are perhaps new; see Amrute (2010).

6 The embodiment of professionalism

Personality-development programmes in New Delhi

Meredith Lindsay McGuire

It's half past eleven on a blazing May morning in New Delhi. Inside the waiting room at a consultancy firm that matches job seekers with positions at international call centres, a small crowd has gathered to await interviews. One young man, Ankit,[1] voices concern about his chances: 'I can speak, but I'm not up to the mark so much in metro cities,' he says. 'Stuff there [in Jagadhri, the town in Haryana where he formerly lived] is village stuff, Haryanvi stuff.' Another applicant, Vivek, suggests that he 'go in for some training, then'.

Later, after receiving a job offer, Vivek speaks with me about the training that he recommended. Born and raised in Chandigarh, he too once feared that he was not 'up to the mark' in cities like New Delhi. But a course in Personality Development and Enhancement (PDE) helped him to 'get confidence':

> It motivated me to take actions. It inspired me actually.… [Since taking the programme] I have been talking with people. I was a shy guy in school, just could not speak. In the programme I explored myself. Explored my personality. I was coming out of it [shyness], coming out of it, coming out of it. Made friends, then girlfriend happened, then another girlfriend happened.… Now, this job!

Vivek's enthusiasm for PDE training is not rare among young Indians. In recent years, PDE institutes have come to enjoy a popularity – and ubiquity – formerly reserved for English language schools. While no data exist regarding the number of PDE institutes operational in India, the widespread appeal of this training is evident in the astonishing variety of institutions that now incorporate personality-development training: from prestigious engineering and business colleges, to NGOs working with socio-economically disadvantaged groups, to military organizations like the National Cadet Corps. In 2012, the Haryana Higher Education Department went so far as to implement a state-wide programme of PDE training at all government-run colleges.

In turn, increasing numbers of aspiring professionals now enrol at independent PDE institutes to acquire a 'confidence' which they, and their trainers, claim is key to success in a rapidly globalizing economy. However, when students at PDE institutes recount their motivations for enrolling, their anxieties

often emphasize not the job market, but the city itself and specific spaces within it. Consider Jessi, a Delhi-born PDE student, described by her trainer as 'a very smart looking girl', who speaks English 'beautifully'. Jessi sought PDE training to overcome the discomfort that she feels when ordering at Barista, a fashionable chain of coffee shops. Accounts like Jessi's suggest that in contemporary India, the confidence required for professional success is also requisite to success in urban, cosmopolitan spaces more generally.

Both the glass-walled offices in which PDE students hope to work and the coffee shops and malls where they want to socialize are products and symbols of the post-liberalization economy. These spaces evoke a lifestyle that promises to transfer effortlessly to any 'modern' corner of the globe. In this regard, such spaces are crucial to discourses and imaginaries of the 'new' India and the 'world-class' lifestyles now available to an increasingly affluent middle class (Brosius 2009, 2010). To be at ease in these spaces defines one's belonging within a decidedly aspirational milieu – and in a new kind of middle class that is imagined as entrepreneurial and enterprising.

Yet, as Jessi's discomfort in Barista suggests, being able to inhabit such spaces is not simply a matter of money, English language skills, and desire. To inhabit these spaces requires a particular brand of confidence, premised on mastery of the practices solicited by such spaces. In this chapter, I argue that the confidence that PDE ostensibly imparts and the professional success that it promises are grounded in the mastery of these spatial practices – quotidian, bodily routines that perform one's position within (and work to produce) socially meaningful space (cf. Harvey 1990). PDE trainers often frame these practices as techniques of self-management and self-discipline in which the physical body becomes the site of management of the self. In this regard, the professionalism which PDE ostensibly produces – and the middle class with which this professionalism is associated – is distinctly neoliberal in nature, characterized by a culture of enterprise in which disciplined self-government appears paramount.

Most of the data for this chapter were gathered in 2009 and 2010. Through participant observation at three corporate and three independently organized PDE workshops, two 'Train the Trainer' workshops, and multi-week PDE courses at four independent training institutes, I examined how 'professionalism' and 'confidence' are conceptualized and produced through a combination of kinesthetic training and explicit practices of self-knowledge and self-management. Through semi-structured interviews with PDE trainers (both corporate and freelance) and students, as well as with young professionals who had participated in PDE workshops, I documented the aspirations and expectations with which people approach these programmes, and also the ways in which such training works to produce new understandings of self and agency. During a seven-week period of observation at a recruiting firm, which screened applicants for positions in multinational companies, I also investigated the performance of professionalism that is explicitly recognized as 'world-class'. Finally, in accompanying informants in their daily routines, I considered how new urban spaces and new urban selves are simultaneously produced, managed, and contested in practice.

The world-class city and its residents

During my fieldwork, New Delhi was finalizing its preparations for the Commonwealth Games. Major thoroughfares were lined with construction barriers, which bore the slogan of the New Delhi Municipal Council: 'Making New Delhi A World-Class City'. When newspapers began to warn that several venues would not be completed in time for the games, the NDMC's promises began to provoke scorn and dismay. A journalist for *The Hindu* succinctly captured the tone of the public outrage: 'The Commonwealth Games fiasco is a much-needed reality check for us. It has not only exposed that we are a long way from being "world-class," but it has also reminded us that we remain a corrupt society'.[2]

The connection between delayed construction plans and a nation's future seems less arcane in New Delhi than it might elsewhere in India. As Amita Baviskar notes, the capital bears a special burden among Indian cities, for 'its image reflects the image of the nation-state' (2003: 90). Indeed, the dramatic and on-going transformation of New Delhi is often explained as the product of a national trajectory altered by economic trends and a series of governmental reforms collectively referred to as 'liberalization'. From the late 1980s onwards, rising land prices and structural shifts in the urban labour market produced a building boom in New Delhi, turning peri-urban industrial and agricultural lands into residential and commercial properties that catered to the middle classes (Banerjee-Guha 2006; Baviskar 2003; Searle 2010; Shaw 2005). The government's drastic reduction of tariff barriers and the revision of import-licensing laws also invited an influx of international business concerns, which reconfigured commercial space in the heart of the city. Foreign lifestyle brands (such as Benetton, Adidas, and Nike) opened stores; McDonald's, Pizza Hut, KFC, Dominos, and Subway franchises began to proliferate. In the early 2000s, Indian developers turned their attention to building shopping malls, which came to rival fashionable shopping destinations in Connaught Place and upscale neighbourhood markets like Greater Kailash M-Block.

The clientele of these new stores and malls is also widely considered to be the product of liberalization. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, multinational companies were eager to take advantage not only of an untapped middle-class consumer market, but also of the country's 'huge army' of educated English-speakers whose skills could be more cheaply purchased than that of their Western counterparts.[3] The children of bankers and civil servants found employment in back-office, voice service, and IT positions that offered salaries supportive of new forms of leisure and consumption. What emerged was a novel demographic of professionals – often called the 'new middle class' – who indulged their world-class tastes in the city's restaurants, malls, and coffee shops.

This new, professional middle class is often characterized not only by its earning power and consumption habits but also by more intangible qualities, including self-discipline and entrepreneurial ambition (Fernandes 2006; Mazzarella 2003, 2005; Radhakrishnan 2011). Indeed, their employers often seek to

cultivate these qualities through workplace training programmes, which emphasize self-knowledge and personal initiative (see Upadhya, this volume). Such aspirations find their pinnacle in much-vaunted entrepreneurs whose enterprising genius has enabled them to transcend humble beginnings and overcome numerous obstacles to create business empires. Indian newspapers are full of accounts of self-made millionaires advising the importance of believing in oneself. 'When you just dish out the theory, nobody believes you', one entrepreneur tells the Indian news website Rediff; 'but when you do it, they believe you'.[4]

Young people thus turn to PDE training in a climate in which professional success seems to require not only educational qualifications but also an agentive and dogged faith in oneself. PDE programmes promise to produce this through the inculcation of discipline and self-management skills that engender confidence, creativity, and drive. In practice, these various strategies of self-making largely focus on bodily demeanours, but they frame the body as a key medium for the transformation of the self. Indeed, PDE trainers insist that disciplined knowledge of and work on the self is the key to professionalism.

In this regard, PDE training espouses a set of 'techniques of the self', which various scholars have identified as crucial to the transformation of subjectivity in an era of neoliberalism. Rose (1992) equates the production of the self-governing citizen-subject – motivated, disciplined, and autonomous – with the state-driven promotion of a culture of enterprise, in which the state's presence recedes as citizens increasingly 'do' for themselves. Indeed, such ideologies of self-management appear to be the very hallmark of enterprise culture, in which citizen-subjects are valorized for the extent to which, through their individual efforts, they realize their full potential as workers and consumers in a 'free' society, 'freedom' itself thus becoming a technology of governance (see Burchell 1993; Hoffman 2006; O'Malley 1996; Ong 2006, 2007; Rose 1992, 1999). However, as Ong (2006, 2007) notes, this framework of governance translates only incompletely across economic and national borders, taking shape in local and historically contingent ways. Indeed, in Ong's view, the dispersed sway of neoliberalism within developing states like India 'further fragments national space and population' (ibid.: 6).

Certainly this fragmentation is starkly visible in New Delhi. Those who enrol in PDE training do so with the aim of joining the new professionals who live in the world-class city: a place of proliferating opportunities for consumption and leisure, studded by the futuristic architecture of high-rise office buildings and malls. The construction of such spaces, often at the expense of *basti*-dwellers whose settlements were razed to lay the buildings' foundations, reflects a new imaginary of the Indian city as a 'post-industrial globalized metropolis' in which urban space is the property of privileged consumer-citizens (Chatterjee 2004: 143; see also Fernandes 2004). This discursive elision of the poor works to produce what Fernandes calls 'a new aesthetics of class purity' (2006: 144), which obscures the fact that the city is not, in fact, transformed wholesale. PDE students' world-class aspirations thus cleave not so much to the city as to

particular spaces within it: coffee shops, glass-walled IT parks, gyms, and sprawling malls.

Membership in these spaces – or aspirations to membership – is often analysed by social theorists as a matter of class. Indeed, this chapter is in dialogue with a broader ethnographic literature on class, which emphasizes the importance of consumption practices in the production, performance, and maintenance of a middle-class subjectivity (see, for example, Liechty 2003; Mankekar 1999; Nisbett 2007; O'Dougherty 2002; Osella and Osella 2000; Patico 2008; Van Wessel 2004). Yet class-based rubrics of wage-labour, consumption, and distinction are less helpful in understanding the explicit, reflected-upon strategies whereby young middle-class Indians work to inhabit a new kind of subjectivity. For instance: if a 'new' middle class has been produced in tandem and recursively with new urban spaces like the coffee shop, then what are we to make of PDE students who speak English, can afford a cappuccino, and would like to order one, but who nevertheless hesitate to enter Barista? For young people who enrol in PDE training after an intimidating experience at a coffee shop, purchasing coffee is not so much an economic transaction or a demonstration of taste as it is a bodily performance of competency – a spatial practice – which signals belonging within a particular social geography marked as aspirational. Indeed, the emphasis in PDE training programmes on practices of bodily self-management ultimately suggests that consumption is but one of many practices through which young people in urban India seek to construct enterprising, new middle-class selves.

This chapter thus considers spaces of consumption chiefly through the lens of how people learn to inhabit them. In recent years, social theorists have begun to attend more closely to spatial practice and the social constitution of space, which is produced through and inscribed with constantly shifting meanings, practices, and norms (de Certeau 1984; Hall 1968; Lefebvre 1991; Massey 1994; Soja 1989). Ethnographies of space tend to focus on the institutional or discursive production of space and the symbolic dimensions of spatialized order (Ghannam 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Low 1996, 2000; Munn 1992 [1986]; Scott 1998). They often examine how a specific spatial order affects people's social experience and perception, as well as their notions of self (e.g. Harvey 1990; Scott 1998). Following Bourdieu (1990), they frequently discuss spatial practices as a kind of 'habitus', a set of bodily dispositions and practices that are dialectically informed and influenced by life histories and the contours of built environments. Yet few studies attend to the ways in which people actively produce space through explicit, reflected-upon practices.

Rather than examining what people say about particular spaces, this chapter examines how people actively seek to learn to inhabit these spaces through the mastery of practices that appear both fitted to and solicited by a broader spatial–social geography. Personality development and enhancement courses offer one view of the production of an enterprising, disciplined, 'confident' personality – one that belongs not only in the world-class office, but also in the shopping mall, café, gym, and multiplex. Ultimately they suggest that the embodiment of

enterprising professionalism is connected both to new understandings of the self and to new ways of inhabiting the city.

Personality development and enhancement training: managing the body and time

PDE institutes solicit students through a variety of strategies: word of mouth; stickers slapped on the back of seats in auto-rickshaws; newspaper advertisements; hoardings and posters; brochures distributed outside coffee-shop chains and fast-food restaurants. These advertisements exhort readers to 'Discover your inner potential!'; 'Make others admire'; and 'Change from ordinary to extraordinary; change from person to a personality.' The majority of participants at the workshops that I observed were university students or recent graduates who enrolled with the understanding that PDE training would prepare them for a very particular kind of middle-class job market. When asked to name the job that they hoped to obtain within the next two years, most aspired to prestigious and/or remunerative employment (popular goals being employment with airlines, back-office positions, and 'anything at an MNC'). Students often cited a lack of confidence, which they feared would impede their ability to secure this job.

Trainers speak to this fear by promising to instil, in the words of one instructor, 'international-level Indian professionalism'. Trainers' understandings of 'professionalism' are irreducible to competencies, office conduct, or particular forms of employment. In interviews with trainers, professionalism emerges as a more nebulously defined 'lifestyle' shaped by the recognizable practices and symbols of a person who has succeeded within the context of global capitalism (cf. Duthie 2005). A typical PDE course thus comprises modules dealing not only with office conduct, but also with dining etiquette, physical exercise and gym-going, personal relationships, and fashion. All areas of instruction are framed as areas in which self-knowledge is key. Indeed, in workshops and interviews, trainers universally employed language that cast the self as an object to be analysed and managed. 'Personality development is managing yourself', one freelance trainer told me. 'Managing your time, managing your communication skills, managing your attitude towards others, managing your attitude towards life: that is what is personality.'

Self-management entails a suite of practices, chief among which are bodily management and time management, which cast the self as autonomous, agentive, and performative. In practice, however, PDE training is foremost an explicit intervention at the level of bodily dispositions. PDE trainers hold bodily practices and habits to be crucial to the production of self-knowledge, confidence, and, ultimately, a professional attitude. Their kinesthetic pedagogies vary widely, comprising techniques and practices such as free movement, yoga, Tai Chi, posture exercises, and dance. Uniformly, however, these pedagogies aim to discipline the body and, by implication, the self – thereby cultivating a mental and physical disposition that is translatable to any cosmopolitan professional environment.

Through course materials and class lectures, PDE trainers promote taxonomies of bodily practices, which connect these practices to qualities marked as professional. They focus in particular detail on mundane bodily habits and routines that might be glossed as grooming and etiquette. A representative programme included the following modules: Body Language (further divided into Sitting, Standing, and Walking; Body Posture; Facial Expression; Handshake; Head; Arms, Legs, and Hands); Personal Care (Hair and Skin Care; Personal Habits; Cleanliness and Polish); Health and Fitness; Dining Etiquette (Table Manners; How to Behave at a Formal Dinner; Using Knife and Fork; Using Chopsticks; Ordering at a Restaurant; Casual Dining; Coffee Shop/Pub/Lounge); and Public Speaking (Body Language; Voice Modulation; Confidence; Making Your Presence Effective; Impressing the Audience). Most trainers begin each class with a lecture on the skills to be learned during class. Sometimes using clips from films and television shows (made in the USA as well as India), trainers explain why the skills are valuable for a professional persona. Their language often imputes qualitative values to physical dispositions: a straight posture is a 'smart' posture; a firm handshake is 'disciplined'; a dragging gait is 'shy' or 'timid'.

Having explained the importance of the particular skills to be mastered, many trainers demonstrate these skills physically, then task students to practise them. Standing up straight, making and holding eye contact, and delivering a firm handshake are rehearsed through role-playing scenarios. At one workshop, a trainer demonstrated for male students how to pull out a chair for a female dining partner, then prompted these students to perform the same service for the female students, who themselves were tasked to master the practice of gracefully taking their seats. At workshops addressing table etiquette, students learn to set a table with various forks, spoons, and knives; meals are served and students are guided through the proper deployment of napkin and silverware. Other basic elements of physical comportment, including spinal posture and the position of one's legs when seated, become subsidiary points in such lessons.

Students are also tasked to evaluate each other. In one workshop, a student's handshake and carriage were described by his peers as 'firm' and 'straight', which the trainer then reframed as 'bold' and 'proud'. Catching on, students then described other performances as 'very bold', 'lazy', and 'scared'. In these moments, the act of practising bodily dispositions for an audience, as well as the audience's discursive framing and evaluation of these dispositions, encodes bodies as powerfully performative. Bodies appear able to signal ineffable qualities of character that connote enterprising professionalism: intelligence; confidence; agency; discipline.

Priyanka, who ran her own PDE institute and worked primarily with university students, explained lessons on bodily etiquette as part of producing 'the public face' – a persona that seems polished and mannerly. But she also posited an intimate connection between one's 'public face', one's inner confidence, and one's ability to act with influence. This was amply evidenced when a student, Harsh, began to text on his phone during a lesson on professional dress.

Annoyed, Priyanka paused her lecture and asked Harsh to tell the class whether he was 'looking nice' in his distressed jeans and casual sneakers. When he shrugged and offered his opinion that his clothing was stylish, she then asked if he 'felt nice' in them, and if he would be 'feeling good' if a potential employer saw him dressed so shabbily. When he refused to reply, she then inquired of the class if they would see a man in this outfit as a self-respecting professional. Making a rare switch into Hindi, which always signalled an important point, she said, 'The way we look at ourselves is the way others look at us.' Grooming here was presented as a form of self-nurturing bodily care – and a performative, bodily disposition, which generated confidence, or 'feeling good' about oneself, while compelling respect from others.

Many students found this aspect of PDE training tremendously persuasive. For some of the female students in particular, the connection between agency, outer appearance, and inner confidence actually reverberated with their philosophies about their own personal beauty regimens. 'I always say, I look good, I feel good, I do good', one young woman told me with a wink. But students did not credit all aspects of PDE training with equal utility. Many grew uncomfortable during exercises in which trainers asked them to critique each other. 'It's embarrassing', one student told me after a class in which she was asked to evaluate a peer's performance as an 'applicant' in a role-played job interview. (Her assessment – 'friendly, nice, very good' – had been criticized by the trainer, who had commented, 'Is that really what an employer wants?' The 'applicant', the trainer went on to explain, had not made sufficient eye contact and had spoken too quickly.)

Most trainers, particularly those who believed that the Indian educational system emphasized rote learning to the detriment of young people's creativity and initiative, viewed such resistance as a crucial part of training. Indeed, encouraging students to be assertive appeared to be a key technique among trainers for engendering confidence and creative thinking. Trainers constantly exhorted students to 'speak', 'say your thoughts!', and, at one particular institute, began each class with the chant, 'Be the master of your life!' As courses progressed, these exhortations often seemed to take effect. Classes became increasingly boisterous, chatty, and occasionally argumentative. Indeed, some students explicitly identified moments of tension in which they had challenged their trainer as instances in which they realized that they had gained confidence during the course.

However, students and trainers tended to judge the utility of specific lessons very differently. Students evaluated classes in terms of whether or not specific techniques seemed likely to contribute to their professional success. Thus most students considered modules discussing professional etiquette and dress to be very satisfactory, but fretted at lessons that seemed less relevant to acquiring a job, such as classes devoted to nutrition and health. During such lessons, trainers sought to redirect students' focus from the functional utility of PDE training (i.e. PDE as preparation for acquiring a 'good' job) to the ways in which practices of bodily management might prepare them for the challenges of a professional

lifestyle more broadly. Discussing the hectic pace of contemporary life and the scheduling challenges that would attend full-time work, one trainer urged her students to envision how they would remain healthy and happy when rushing to and from the office every day. 'If you are not well, how will you work?' she asked. She challenged her students to track their dietary intake for the next week: 'What is going into your body? Do you know?' Trainers who advocated attention to diet and exercise regimes emphasized the necessity for conscious discipline of the body in order to achieve not only physical but also professional fitness.

In practice, PDE training advocates an attention to the body as a form of self-government. Knowledge and management of one's bodily dispositions and practices are configured as key to one's ability to act successfully in the world, as a professional. This explicit link between mind and body thus also implicitly links bodily government to *agency*. Ironically, then, while PDE programmes often claim to facilitate communication and interpersonal skills, these same programmes cast professionalism as an individualistic practice cultivated through self-knowledge, self-management, and self-development. PDE training thereby evidences an uncanny accord with neoliberal logics of autonomy, self-discipline, and self-care (cf. O'Malley 1996; Rose 1992, 1999).

In this regard, it is provocative to consider PDE's alleged origins in call-centre training programmes.[5] Training programmes in the foreign-process customer-service sector seek, through the inculcation of bodily techniques including accent and intonation, to create so-called 'global', 'neutral', or 'standard' forms of service. In the website description of a semester-long training programme for aspiring customer-service agents, the first goal of the programme is stated thus: 'Overcome Indianism'.[6] Such discourses suggest a global terrain that itself is standardized, and which can be negotiated successfully only by those service agents who are unmarked by local characteristics or 'Indianisms'. Some PDE trainers also make use of such language. One such trainer, Samit, described his job to me with the blunt statement: 'We remove Indianisms.' In PDE programmes that aim to produce 'professionalism', then, physical pedagogies invoke the body as the site of a standardizing process, which will produce universally recognizable 'professional' characteristics like confidence and assertiveness. This training also co-produces the category that is *not* world-class: the local characteristics and 'Indianisms' which must be 'removed' to ensure the successful performance of professionalism.

Students also often explicitly seek to eradicate those characteristics marked as 'local'. Several newcomers to Delhi expressed anxiety that their regional accents or behaviour would betray their non-cosmopolitan origins. Even those from Delhi often expressed concerns about their lack of cosmopolitanism. One student explained to me that while her neighbourhood was well connected by public transport to more central (and affluent) areas of New Delhi, her background still posed a disadvantage to her: 'So there are metros, there is good transport, but still the people there don't know how to speak in English, how to behave.' Others explained their success through reference to their increasingly cosmopolitan

demeanours. One graduate of PDE training proudly attributed her recent professional successes to the fact that people could not tell she was from Agra, where 'girls are very shy'. Rather, she said, 'Because of the way I behaved, the way I talked, people felt I am from a metro.'

In a new economic landscape governed by the global market, cosmopolitanism has become a professional credential. Yet PDE trainers often frame their work as a nationalist endeavour, insofar as PDE aims to produce professionals fit to handle the new social and economic demands – and opportunities – through which post-liberalization India will advance to a position of global prominence. Indeed, PDE trainers often encourage students to understand their essential Indianness as a charismatic advantage. Trainers who advocate practices of yoga and meditation as forms of bodily management will remind their students that these exercises, being of native origin, are 'natural assets' for Indians. When focusing on etiquette, trainers also encourage students to understand Indianness as a charismatic advantage. Dignity, creativity, and discipline are presented as inherently Indian qualities; professionalism is framed as a return to a traditionally Indian conduct that demonstrates respect for oneself and others. As one trainer explained to her class when introducing a module on 'Making Your Presence Effective': 'We just go back to our own knowledge that we've had for centuries.'

In practice, however, 'Indianness' frequently appears problematic to the project of professionalism, and never more so than in discussions of time management. In workshops, trainers routinely bemoaned chronic tardiness and disorganization as essentially Indian traits. Four trainers explicitly blamed the 'Indian' belief in cyclical time for Indians' ostensibly widespread disrespect for deadlines. This belief, they posited, was incompatible with the schedule-driven culture of multinational workplaces, thus damaging not only individuals' professional ambitions, but also the nation's economic future. ('Chinese understand deadlines,' one trainer warned his class. 'Philippines, they also know deadlines.') Many trainers also asserted the existence of a culturally embedded disregard for organization and scheduling which, they claimed, stems from Indians' rich and wide-ranging network of social obligations – which, unlike other nationalities, Indians feel compelled to honour at the expense of their work. To allow social obligations to enter into times and spaces earmarked for work (exemplified, one trainer told me, by the employee who leaves the office at mid-morning to meet a relative who happens to be in the neighbourhood) is to commit an 'Indianism' that is incompatible with professionalism.

Time management thus becomes a strategy of mediation between social obligations and practices construed as essentially 'Indian', on the one hand, and on the other hand, professional expectations and new temporalities marked as cosmopolitan and world-class. To manage time more efficiently, trainers advocated various concrete techniques. Many provided planners or worksheets in which students scheduled specific periods to be spent with various categories of acquaintance (friends; family; girlfriend/boyfriend). Some training programmes required students to record their actual activities throughout the week, and also

to outline and prioritize daily, weekly, monthly, and long-term professional goals. Students also role-played conversations in which they 'kept' their schedules by turning down invitations from friends, or by resisting familial pressure to skip work in order to attend social events. When one student objected strenuously to the idea of role-playing a situation in which she declined an invitation to the wedding of a distant cousin, the trainer encouraged her to think of relationships as existing in different tiers, ranked by 'priority'. He instructed her to decide whose weddings would be obligatory, and whose would not be 'so important' that she would skip her professional duties to attend it.

For the most part, students claimed to find these schedules helpful – viewing them, in line with trainers' explanations, as a technique to help them retain their rich social networks within the constraints of a more organized, professional life. 'It will help work–life balance,' one student told me. In practice, however, these schedules also reorganized students' everyday lives in accordance with particular understandings of individual autonomy, family, and 'lifestyle'. Altogether, this emphasis on aggressive monitoring of one's own time, activities, ambitions, and relationships encouraged a continuous and self-disciplining gaze. Paired with practices of bodily management, time management thus underscores how PDE constructs the self as a product of on-going study, cultivation, and discipline.

The unspoken yet foundational requirement of time management is the adoption of new spatial practices. In workshops, trainers reiterated continually that to diverge from a set schedule is to disrespect oneself, and to be tardy is to communicate disrespect and a lack of professionalism to others. In this view, arriving late for work or an appointment is an egregious *faux pas*. As one trainer lectured,

> You don't make a person wait.… What happens is, [if] the person is waiting outside for an hour, an hour and a half, there is no respect for somebody else's time – that is not soft skills. That is not good manners. That damages relationships whether it is intimate relationships or general friendships or boss's opinion.

To keep an elective schedule requires agency; to be on time requires agency expressed through mobility. That is, the management of self requires efficient and purposeful movement through space. But the convoluted spatiality of New Delhi works against this agentive mobility. The sprawl of the city and the heavy traffic on its roads means that timely arrival requires careful planning and effort. If one lives in New Delhi and has a meeting or interview in Gurgaon or Noida (satellite cities, which house many of the multinational companies for which aspiring professionals hope to work), two or more hours may be required to reach one's destination. PDE students negotiated the spatial complexity of New Delhi by staying in touch via text messages with those whom they intended to meet. These messages communicated their whereabouts and provided a continuous, evolving picture of when they might arrive at their destination. To consistently schedule in advance the precise time of one's meetings with intimates,

friends, and colleagues, and to commit to timeliness in one's arrival, is to adopt a very different way of navigating the city. This marked strategy of time management is also a negotiation of space, which conspicuously performs one's professionalism.

Professional spatial practice

The explicit aim of PDE programmes is to produce professionalism. Yet students who enrol in these courses describe their lack of confidence not only in relation to the workplace, but also in reference to a variety of other urban spaces like coffee shops and malls. It would seem that these new cosmopolitan spaces require the same brand of performative confidence as multinational corporate offices. Indeed, knowledge of how to navigate through a mall or coffee shop is not obvious or given; nor, as PDE trainers might claim, is it solely a function of confidence. Rather, the successful navigation of such spaces is a form of embodied knowledge expressed through bodily practices and dispositions that are fundamentally performative. In short, new urban spaces solicit particular bodily practices and dispositions that are closely connected to the professional practices instilled by PDE training.

Consider a typical coffee shop, 'Café, Coffee Day', located near Delhi University in the north of the city. The face of the café is a broad wall of glass, which looks on to the street and the broken sidewalk. As with most other coffee shops that I visited in New Delhi, the window seats here are always the first to be occupied, the angle of the sun permitting. Approaching customers are aware of the attention of those sitting behind the window, and their entry draws the attention of others seated farther away. In this moment, newcomers' familiarity with coffee shops like this one becomes obvious. Most customers do not loiter as they look around for an open table; instead, they immediately make their way down the single, central aisle. Newcomers hesitate then perhaps follow this aisle all the way to the end, to the service area where coffee is prepared. If so, they are then sent to take a seat, for the service persons prefer to take orders from seated customers.

The built environment of New Delhi coffee shops places a performative emphasis on customers themselves. It directs their attention away from the service areas where coffee is ordered and made (and which most customers never approach) and towards each other – in particular, towards the front door. Indeed, it would be difficult to enter this space without perceiving oneself to be evaluated by one's fellow customers. The body language of entrants appears to reflect this perception in ways that echo evaluative sessions in PDE training programmes: entrants stand straighter ('more smartly'), make brief eye contact with those watching ('confidently'), and adopt a purposeful stride toward their table of choice ('boldly').

Many new consumption-oriented spaces in New Delhi, but in particular coffee shops and malls, are built to maximize customers' visibility to each other. In the vast majority of shopping malls constructed since the early 2000s in the National Capital Region, shops are located along multi-storey walkways, which

wrap around one or more central, open areas. These atriums give customers on several floors a clear view of each other. The escalators, too, are often designed to preserve users' ability to see, and be seen by, shoppers in other locations of the mall. Not only through this architectural design but also through the distribution of seating areas, the environment encourages a voyeuristic attentiveness to one's fellow visitors. Indeed, it is unusual not to find several people on various levels leaning against the railing and watching passers-by on other floors. These elements conspire to produce a heightened awareness among visitors of their own movements through these spaces.

For an observer more familiar with American mall culture, it is striking how few people in New Delhi malls actually carry shopping bags.[7] How one inhabits the mall is far more telling of one's familiarity with the space than whether or not one is actually making purchases there. First, to enter a mall requires successful passage through a security checkpoint, which almost always entails a manual search of personal bags and a brief (usually visual) inspection of the entrant. The security guards' ostensible task is to prevent visitors from bringing in weapons, but by their very presence they also deter the entry of those who do not feel entitled to – or confident of – a welcome in a 'good crowd' (as many mall-goers described their fellow shoppers to me). This 'crowd' might be glossed as affluent, stylish, or professional: a demographic able to purchase premium goods. In effect, however, the ability to enter the mall self-selects not for economic prosperity, but for those who feel confident enough to brave the gaze of the guards.

Once inside, visitors must demonstrate competence in a set of bodily practices not routinely solicited by other spaces – chief among them the use of escalators. That this is a learned skill becomes evident on the numerous occasions when visitors hesitate before stepping aboard, occasionally even withdrawing to let others pass before them and demonstrate how to board. The shops, too, require particular skills. At department stores like Pantaloons, customers independently browse through items, carry them to fitting rooms, and take them to the cash register without unsolicited assistance from store employees. Regular visitors to the mall often cited this lack of interference as one of the pleasures of shopping there; but for new shoppers, this autonomy contrasts sharply with local markets, where the vendor usually controls the consumer's access to goods and often attempts to guide his or her consumption choices. Merchants in markets often calculate bills by hand or calculator, but in malls, cashiers use computers or electronic cash registers, vastly reducing the time taken to pay for an item. Regular visitors match the economy of this process, usually approaching the counter with cash or credit card in hand.

These spaces thus render visible bodily practices that communicate comfort, knowledge, and confidence – or, conversely, uncertainty and awkwardness. Those who hesitate before boarding an escalator, who fumble for their wallet at the cash register, or who enter a shop and look for assistance that will not be immediately forthcoming unwittingly perform their lack of belonging in this space. On the other hand, those who board an escalator or enter a shop with

self-directed purpose demonstrate a mastery of spatial practices that marks their belonging in the cosmopolitan space of the mall. New urban spaces thus solicit an embodied knowledge, which adheres closely to the bodily performances of confidence, discipline, and autonomy cultivated in PDE training. In turn, these bodily performances and practices, which work to produce appearances of confident belonging in such spaces, also work to inscribe the spaces themselves as world-class: the kinds of space, in other words, where such practices appear not only appropriate, but dominant.

Conclusion

In a rapidly changing landscape where fluency in English, high marks in examinations, and technical skills are widely considered insufficient to excel professionally, young people in PDE programmes strive to learn to effortlessly perform the practices that constitute and communicate an enterprising, cosmopolitan, professional self. The focus in PDE on bodily dispositions works to construct a legible, professional body: a spine that holds straight; a firm handshake; direct eye contact. These practices are rendered universalist in their ostensible ability to communicate 'international-level' professionalism, confidence, and authority in a variety of cosmopolitan spaces – not only in the multinational workplace, but also in the shopping mall, café, and gym.

Individual bodily particularities simultaneously trouble this universalist claim. Many young people struggle to mediate between their 'professional personalities' and their embedded positions within gendered, religious, or familial histories. Several times, I accompanied young female professionals from their offices directly to coffee shops at nearby malls, where they each had independently chosen to give their interviews. In both spaces direct eye contact and a handshake, or a skirt-suit and high heels, produce a professional performance. But as I accompanied these informants throughout other routines of their daily lives, it became clear that they did not employ these bodily practices on all occasions. If going from the office to the local market, for instance, most female informants would stop at home to change out of their work clothing, not only to protect the clothing itself, but also because legs bared by a skirt-suit assume different meanings at the market than in the mall. Once in the market, they adopted different bodily dispositions, some subtle (eye contact and physical gestures of greeting) and some quite marked (at the office and mall, physical contact with strangers is rare; at the market, elbows clash and the appropriate distance to keep from strangers is much smaller). While several of these women expressed frustrations about 'being a woman in New Delhi', none of them perceived the contextual adoption of different clothing and bodily practices as a compromise of their 'true selves'. However, many described feeling most themselves and least restricted as women when in their offices, and several explicitly likened their workplaces to a 'home'. When asked where they felt most free, many of my informants identified non-domestic spaces where they regularly went straight from work: social destinations including particular malls, cafés, and clubs.

These spaces and the practices attendant on professionalism are dialectically produced. That is, professional practices not only require particular contexts in which to be manifest: they simultaneously work to shape the spaces in which they are manifested, producing an urban social geography marked as cosmopolitan and world-class. Such spaces, and the world-class city itself, are more commonly examined in anthropological literature through the rubric of middle-class consumption. But, as we have seen, being able to buy the cappuccino is useless if one does not feel comfortable enough to enter the coffee shop, and drinking the cappuccino signifies little if one feels awkward while doing so. In PDE workshops, students strive to become subjects who not only possess the confidence to enter coffee shops, but in fact feel most comfortable in such spaces, where they can perform the enterprising 'selves' that they have aspired to be.

Notes

1 All names in this article are pseudonyms.
2 K. Sharma (2010) 'In a class of our own', *The Hindu*, 10 March, available online at: www.thehindu.com/thehindu/mag/2010/10/03/stories/2010100350100300.htm, accessed 28 July 2011.
3 Deutsche Bank AG (2006) 'Outsourcing to India: crouching tiger set to pounce', Deutsche Bank Research, 25 October, available online at: www.dbresearch.com/PROD/DBR_INTERNET_EN-PROD/PROD0000000000192125.pdf, accessed 5 August 2011.
4 S. Warrier (2008) 'A crorepati who lives in a hut!', *Rediff*, 29 April, available online at: www.rediff.com/money/2008/apr/29sarath1.htm, accessed 30 July 2011.
5 None of my interlocutors claimed to know of an original or foundational PDE programme. However, most trainers trace PDE's origins in India to soft-skills training programmes in offshore call centres. This training, which focuses primarily on communication skills, often involves a high degree of physicality. In voice and accent training, trainees learn the importance of the precise, physical positioning of their lips and tongue: 'If there is tension in the throat, there is tension in the voice, and tension in the air between you [and the customer], too', reads one training manual. To build team camaraderie, trainers use physical games, and many modules on customer care emphasize that sitting straight, smiling, and nodding help to convey, even over the telephone, the friendly, solicitous professionalism that overseas customers expect. Call-centre training has codified the notion that bodily practices are crucial to the production of professional service. Indeed, many PDE trainers worked previously as soft-skills trainers in call centres, and they advertise this experience as one of their key credentials.
6 NIIT Career Programmes, 2006, available online at: www.niit.com/ILB/India/ASP/ILB_index.asp?Section=ILB&L1=Programmes&L2=Career%20Programmes&L3=BPO%20Management, accessed 30 October, 2006.
7 Surveys and informal interviews that I conducted in popular malls in New Delhi suggest that the majority of visitors do not go to the mall with specific purchases in mind, but instead visit the mall to socialize with friends, or to enjoy the 'crowd' and the 'ambiance'.

7 Motivating Madhu

India's SEZs and the spirit of enterprise

Jamie Cross

Madhu's wall

I first met Madhu when he was 18 years old and earning Rs.1,200 a month as a trainee at Worldwide Diamonds, a European-owned diamond factory in coastal Andhra Pradesh. The factory was located in a Special Economic Zone (SEZ) outside the industrial port city of Visakhapatnam. In 2005, I spent 12 months learning to cut, polish, and sort diamonds at this factory. For four weeks I sat alongside Madhu and eight other young men in one of the factory's dedicated sorting departments, sifting through consignments of rough diamonds that had been dug out of the earth in Namibia or Botswana and sorting them into categories based on their quality and commercial value.

Over time I lost touch with Madhu. On a return visit to Andhra Pradesh in 2007, I discovered that he had left the Worldwide Diamonds factory. I made a few enquiries but did not spend much time trying to track him down. Then in 2009, four years after I first met him, a chance encounter on the streets of Visakhapatnam city brought us back in contact. Driving past me on the back of a friend's motorbike as I left a photocopy shop in a dusty back street, he shouted out my name. He jumped off the bike to give me his phone number and urged me to come and visit him at home. 'Worldwide Diamonds is gone', he said. 'I walked away from that place and never looked back. Now I'm a teacher and a singer. I'm working hard – I need to work hard. Because everything is like a competition these days. The world is a competition.' I promised that I would come to visit, and he zoomed off into the traffic.

A few weeks later I made it to his family home in the highway township of Gajuwaka. He showed me into a room at the top of the two-storey house, which doubled up as a bedroom, a music studio where he played movie hits on a CD player and sang along to them, and a classroom in which he offered extra-curricular tutoring to local primary-school children. The room was barely decorated. There was a table with a CD player in one corner, a mattress, a couple of steel chairs, and little else. But the attention of any visitor was inevitably drawn to the wall of Madhu's room (see Figure 7.1).

Next to a puja shelf replete with a large bronze statue of Saraswati Devi and images of Sai Baba, Madhu had pasted an extraordinary sequence of words and

Figure 7.1 Madhu's wall in 2009.

images. The words 'Aim' and 'Life', 'Target', 'Leader', and 'World' were written in careful capital letters on pieces of A4 paper and pasted around two colour images, torn from magazines. The first was a cityscape with fireworks exploding in the sky; the second, pasted at the very apex of the display, was a picture of the British monarch's crown jewels. Around the edges of the display were two slogans that seemed to echo the advertising slogans of global footwear and clothing brands: 'You can do it' and 'Take it serious.'

SEZs and the entrepreneurial subject

This chapter takes Madhu's wall seriously as a lens through which to think about entrepreneurialism and subjectivity in some of the most contested spaces of capitalism in post-liberalization India. As an ethnographic object, Madhu's motivational art installation precisely encapsulated the notion of 'self as enterprise', a project to be worked on and re-crafted, that recent social theory associates with contemporary management and projects of liberal government (Rose 1989; Ong 2006). For Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2007) this kind of managerial language and its attendant practices are 'the most natural expression of a new spirit of capitalism': an ideological discourse of legitimation that engenders commitment to capitalism by encouraging people to project their ambitions and desires into a future in which the rules of the game have already been established. For Ong (2006), writing in a Foucauldian tradition and drawing on a literature concerned with biopolitics and governmentality, the adoption of economic zoning as

a spatial technology in countries across Asia has marked the extension of 'market-driven truths and calculations' into new realms of social and economic planning (Ong 2006, 2007). According to Ong, economic zones like those in contemporary India are 'problem spaces' for the proliferation and penetration of neoliberal modes of subject formation.

Over the past decade India's economic enclaves have encouraged exuberant dreams of private accumulation. As a mechanism for acquiring vast tracts of land and as a planning technology that creates spaces of private enterprise freed from the frictions of the state, the country's SEZ policy has invited a motley assortment of real-estate developers and industrial capitalists to fulfil their fantasies of growth and enrichment. The rapid proliferation of SEZs in India has given rise to a body of critical academic scholarship, journalism, and activist writing concerned with the politics of land acquisition and the terms and conditions of labour (e.g. Menon and Nigam 2007; Banerjee-Guha 2008; Ananthanarayanan 2008; Sampat 2010; Srivastava and Kothari 2012). Within this literature we frequently find a depiction of the SEZ as a privileged site or conduit for the penetration and diffusion of an economic and cultural logic associated with neoliberalism; and of the discourses and practices associated with liberal government that shape subjectivities, persons, and selves around a dominant logic of neoliberal rule.

In this chapter I take a different position. Rather than present India's SEZs as unique catalysts or conduits for projects of rule and forms of government, I show how SEZs like those in north-coastal Andhra Pradesh create other conditions of possibility – rarely predicted or intended – for projects of self-improvement that are shaped by family histories of social mobility and kinship obligations as much as by strategies of neoliberal rule. Concerned journalists and social activists frequently paint India's SEZs as dystopian spaces in which workers are subjected to depersonalizing, inhumane, and deeply exploitative managerial practices. Yet in the context of high youth un/under-employment in provincial Andhra Pradesh India zone, factories like Worldwide Diamonds represent a space of promise, opportunity, and hope for many young people. Workers like Madhu described the factory as a 'channel' or 'source', and, as I came to understand, their lived experience of work here was shaped by their attempts to make or re-make themselves through waged labour (Cross 2009, 2010, 2011). While the economic zone may be a particular site in which ideologies and managerial discourses associated with neoliberal governance regimes have been introduced into provincial India, I show how they come to be interwoven with located social histories of upward mobility and come to overlap with a range of other ideas about the capacity of individuals to make calculated decisions and to refashion themselves in profitable, opportunistic, proactive, and fulfilling ways.

As this chapter will show, while the slogans and images on Madhu's wall, for example, echoed ideas about the liberated individual that lie at the heart of contemporary management ideologies and reverberate around the SEZ in which he once worked, this 'spirit of capitalism' is given life only as it is incorporated into dreams and schemes for personal transformation. The forms of market discipline

to which workers are subjected inside India's global manufacturing units overlap with other ideas about the capacity of individuals to make calculated decisions and to refashion themselves in ways that have other genealogies. As other chapters in this edited collection emphasize, notions of enterprise and entrepreneurship circulate around India in diverse ways, and this chapter challenges accounts of India's SEZs as straightforward spaces that advance and extend governance regimes in post-liberalization India by producing neoliberal subjects, persons, and selves.

The projects for self-improvement that Madhu plotted for himself on the wall of his room were shaped by his affective relationships with family members, their personal histories of migration and upward mobility, and his filial ties of love and respect as much as they were influenced by globally circulating discourses or languages of 'entrepreneurship'. Indeed, far from reflecting a hegemonic set of ideas, practices, and languages, Madhu's wall offers an important reminder that people appropriate and inhabit language in ways shaped by and concordant with their needs, resources, and desires. In what follows, then, I follow Madhu into and out of the SEZ, using his own words to explore how family ties and relationships constitute an overriding structural context within which young men like him have made sense of and internalized the discourses and practices to which they were once exposed on the factory floor.

The runaway

When I first met him around the diamond-sorting tables, Madhu gave me an aggrandized version of his life history, telling me that he had completed the first year of an aeronautical engineering degree in Chennai but had been forced to quit because of his family's financial problems. Over time, however, it transpired that the stories that Madhu spun about himself were carefully constructed artefacts, their narratives artfully tailored, fashioned with and to the times. As for many of the young men whom I met on the floor of Worldwide Diamonds, the workplace was a space in which they could fashion new narratives about themselves. As I was to discover, Madhu had never been to Chennai, let alone studied engineering, and his entry into the workplace had been shaped by feelings of obligation and indebtedness to his family as much as by financial need. Here, story making and story telling emerge as a social practice through which young men reflect upon their fortunes and opportunities in the context of rapid social and economic transformation. Their dreams and desires, sometimes vague and sometimes impossible, often emerge as what Loic Wacquant has called 'enabling fantasies', which allow people to continue thinking about the future in an uncertain and precarious present (Berlant, 2007: 299; Wacquant 2000).

As I came to piece it together during conversation on and off the factory floor over the following five years, Madhu's life story had presented repeated opportunities for his reinvention. He was born in 1988 to a young woman who had recently migrated to the highway township of Gajuwaka, outside Visakhapatnam, at a time when the construction of the Visakha Steel Plant and the

emergence of a whole host of auxiliary industries made this one of the fastest-growing urban areas in Andhra Pradesh. He knows very little about his biological parents. His mother came from a Kapu caste family somewhere farther south along the coast, in a place that he thinks might have been East Godavari. His biological father left when he was very young, and Madhu never saw or heard of him again. He grew up in a house near the city's Defence Academy and he had a younger brother who died. Madhu's memories of these years were of a violent domestic life. He remembers his mother drinking heavily and being involved in loud public arguments.

> She used to quarrel with people, shouting at everyone, even me. When she had money people supported her, but later they focused on the problems she was having.… See: she created her own problems. She used to shout at others and the house was in a big mess! I remember that I didn't like it. I was exhausted with the environment – with all the people coming to the house and arguing – and I began to ask why are other children enjoying their life? What happened to me? I began to understand that I wanted something else.

He remembers one particular fight when he was a 12-year-old student in a sixth-standard government school. This fight was louder and more physical than before, and he ran away to seek refuge in the home of a neighbouring family in the grounds of the Defence Colony. The couple adopted him, making him their third son and, although he knows that his biological mother lives in Hyderabad, he has no contact with her. Madhu's adoptive parents were both *Patnaiks*, Telugu-speaking Kshatryiyas, whose families had their roots in the villages of Parathipuram and Tekhali, on the borders of Andhra Pradesh and Orissa, but they had both been brought up on the outskirts of Visakhapatnam city in the years before the Steel Plant was built, when the area was still forested, and rich with pomegranate plantations and neem trees.

The life histories of these adoptive parents had obvious and subtler impacts on Madhu, changing his fortunes but also providing him with powerful male role models. His adoptive father's father had been a policeman. He died when Madhu's father was only nine years old, leaving this eldest son to become the major breadwinner for a family of five. 'My father was a very hard-working person', Madhu told me. 'From nine years old he started working and earning. First as a helper for a carpenter. Then as a carpenter. And then slowly, slowly, slowly he began to earn something.'

In the 1980s Madhu's father got a job as an employee in Coromandel Fertilisers, one of Gajuwaka's oldest private-sector companies. He was employed first as a worker in a loading bay before being promoted to an employee in the factory's bagging plant. Joining the Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), the Labour wing of the National Congress Party, he was eventually elected as a union leader and then as the Congress Party's youth representative in Gajuwaka. As the population of Gajuwaka grew, this political status opened new doors for

Madhu's adoptive father. At one point in the 1980s, he became involved in a shady real-estate deal, when a local Congress MLA (Member of the Legislative Assembly) offered him 15 acres of land to sell for a commission. The incident was a turning point and – proving himself a reluctant entrepreneur – he backed away from the opportunity and from party politics. Disillusioned, he left the Congress Party in the 1990s and renounced all of his political ambitions, later telling Madhu that 'politicians will always expect something from people after being elected'. He retired, aged 58, from Coromandel Fertilisers and established himself as a local social worker, raising the money to found the Indira Gandhi Colony for the urban poor in New Gajuwaka.

His adoptive father's income had enabled Madhu to complete his education not at a government institute but at a private English-medium school. This was followed by two years of intermediate-level education, and Madhu eventually completed his 'plus two' qualification at the city's AVK College. After graduating he had enrolled at the Visakhapatnam Defence Academy, where his maternal grandfather had once worked as an English lecturer. 'It was my grandfather's idea,' Madhu explained, 'and he asked the Principal to reduce my fees – from 3,000 to 15,000 rupees – for one year.' But when this year finished, his grandfather had been unable to negotiate an extension. The family's financial resources could not cover the increased costs, and Madhu dropped out.

This was the same moment at which his adoptive father retired and he was compelled to spend his retirement money not on Madhu's education but on the repayment of numerous loans. 'Gradually he distributed everything to the people who had lent him money,' Madhu told me, 'and by the end nothing was left with him.' At the same time his eldest brother – who was also working in the Coromandal Fertilisers factory as a contract worker – got married. 'Before he got married he used to support the family. But when he got married he separated from us. His wife wanted a separate house, she didn't want to live here, so she took him, and he went off to live with her in Gopalapatnam.'

The marriage of his adopted brother left Madhu with a newly-felt, adult responsibility for the well-being of his adoptive parents:

> After my brother got married it was as if we should all support ourselves. But my father had retired, my elder brother had left, my second brother didn't have any work. The family didn't have any other source except me.

In search of work, Madhu scoured his contacts. A friend of his older brother had been employed for several months in Worldwide Diamonds' rough-polishing section and on his recommendation Madhu applied for a job. He successfully navigated the interview process and was put to work in the sorting section, where I would eventually meet him.

Madhu knew that the factory's starting salary was low and that he could have earned more money by plying the roads around Visakhapatnam in an auto-rickshaw. But, like many other men whose family had invested in their primary and secondary education, he considered such low-status jobs to be socially

inappropriate (Cross 2009). Although factory labour in the SEZ was low-waged and precarious, it offered the veneer of formal employment in the industrial economy:

> I needed to work. Even if I could get more money by driving an auto-rickshaw, I couldn't do that, because of my father's … position in society. Can you imagine … if his son suddenly started to drive an auto-rickshaw! We can't degrade the name of our father like that. Worldwide Diamonds wasn't a high-status job, but it was an integrated job. It was closed. No one knew what was happening inside. No one knows if you are a manager or a worker. That's the mentality or the psychology of people around here. They think that working on the side of the road is not respectable, but that working in an integrated place, in a room, is professional. Here in my locality, nobody knew anything about that company. They just saw it as a good job.

The industrial worker

Visakhapatnam's SEZ is one of India's oldest, one of only nine purpose-built export-oriented enclaves built by the central government between the 1960s and the end of the 1990s. When the zone opened in 1997, it attracted an Anglo-Belgian consortium of diamond industrialists looking to build a world-class factory that would offer diamond-cutting and polishing services at very low cost to European traders. At its peak in 2005, the factory employed 1,250 Telugu-speaking workers to cut and polish consumer diamonds for European and North American clients. That year the factory processed 14,000 carats of low-grade rough diamond, with an export value of approximately four million dollars, every month.

The sorting section in which Madhu worked was a specially fitted out room on the factory's first floor, designed to serve the needs of one client, an Antwerp-based diamond-trading company known to people on the factory floor only as 'SB'. The unit employed 50 young Telugu-speaking men and women. The entire operation was overseen on behalf of the client by three Belgian men, old-timers of the diamond industry in their mid-sixties. Like other new recruits to the factory, Madhu was paid a trainee wage of Rs.1,500 a month to work eight-hour shifts, six days a week. In 2005 he and others in the sorting section sorted through an average of 27,000 carats of rough diamonds every month.

As Worldwide Diamonds' managers worked to keep the factory efficient and globally competitive, they appealed to workers' desires for increased freedom and autonomy over work processes, encouraging them to manage or govern themselves, to feel ownership of their workplace, and to see the factory as an arena of self-improvement. Firmly rooted in the central canons of management and organizational theory that emerged during the 1980s, managers here sought to 'overcome organisational problems, and to ensure dynamism, excellence and innovation by activating and engaging the self-fulfilling aspirations of the

individuals who make up the workforce' (Harvey 1990; Rose 1989, 1993; Miller and Rose 1995). New forms of industrial organization – cell working, just-in-time production systems, zero inventory levels, computer-integrated manufacturing – linked production to the capacities and commitment of employees. A 'total quality control system' saw responsibility for the quality of production devolved to individuals, encouraging workers to check and monitor their own work; elected works councils and 'suggestions boxes' invited people to participate in a process of 'continuous improvement' and become part of management decisions by providing feedback on the layout of workspaces, the performance of machines, or the design of production systems; and workers were encouraged to see the factory as a space in which they could improve themselves. The production regime that emerged was one which explicitly promoted an idea of waged labour as a vehicle of self-fulfilment, an idea of the individual as an 'entrepreneur of the self' and a notion of the 'self as enterprise'; a self that works upon itself, cultivating new skills, sensibilities, and capacities (Du Gay 2010: 660–2).

The sorting room in which Madhu spent his shift was a large open-plan space divided into four rows of broad white tables. Each table sat eight people, seven blue-uniformed sorting workers like Madhu and one red-coated monitor. Each person was seated in front of a large white sheet of A3 paper, illuminated from overhead by a flexible desk light. At the start of each day Madhu emptied a plastic box of precious stones on to the paper and lifted up each stone, one by one, for inspection through a hand-held magnifying glass or *loupe*. Under the glass, differences in the colour and quality of each diamond became apparent, and it was the role of each sorting worker to separate the stones into different categories based on the work required to bring out the highest potential yield.

Here Madhu and his co-workers were taught to understand something about the geology of diamonds and the global market on which they were traded. They were trained to take responsibility for the stones that passed through their hands in ways that removed the need for 'quality checkers', and they were encouraged to feed suggestions for improvements in workplace organization up the managerial hierarchy. The most important task of a sorter like Madhu was to identify flaws or inclusions – fissures, cracks, piques, and gluts – within each stone and to determine whether it was still 'makeable' or not. As they worked, the sorters at Madhu's table called out the names of these categories to each other: 'Crystals', 'Saw One', 'Saw Two', 'Fancy', 'Makeable One', 'Makeable Two', 'Cleavage', 'Reject'. 'Crystals' were rough stones so clean and clear that they caught the light like a finished diamond. 'Saw-category' stones had internal flaws, but could be sawn in two to guarantee a yield.

This sorting process was tied directly to the global market for rough diamonds, and Madhu was required to be attentive to daily variations in the ways in which diamonds were sorted. The line between 'cleavage' diamonds (those that were deemed too damaged to have any commercial value) and 'makeable stones' (those that with work might yield a profit) was constantly changing. On some days the client decided that more damaged stones could be placed in the makeable

category, pushing up the supply but pushing down the quality; on other days the client decided to keep damaged stones out of circulation, pushing down supply and increasing quality.

Around the table Madhu and other sorters had to decide whether or not to 'push' a stone into a makeable category, in a process that their supervisors taught them to call 'the play'. The skill in sorting these stones lay not only in being able to recognize flaws in the stone but in being able to imagine how a diamond could be hewn out of it in such a way that, as Madhu once said, 'it brings more money'. This task was complicated by fluctuations on the global market for uncut diamonds. As the daily price and supply of precious stones go up or down on the floor of a diamond exchange or bourse in Belgium or Germany, so too does the line between a poor-quality stone and a low-quality stone change on the floor of a diamond-sorting room in South Africa or India. Every day around their tables in the Worldwide Diamonds sorting section, Madhu and his co-workers had to make decisions about what stones were worth and push stones from one category to another, based on information about the current state of the market. For people who had never held or examined a finished or cut diamond, the ability to see this potential yield from each small fragment of rock required considerable feats of imagination. 'It doesn't matter if you have never seen a finished diamond,' Madhu told me. 'Here you can learn to picture it in your head.'

Reflecting on his choices and decisions in the labour market four years later, Madhu describes the moment he joined the factory labour force as an expression of filial love and sacrifice. 'When I went to work in Worldwide Diamonds,' he told me, 'that was for my family. I had to do whatever was necessary for them. My family always thought I was a source for them. But they had always been a source for me really.' At the same time, he acknowledges that the factory also presented opportunities for crafting his own path: 'But I went to work there for me too. I had to work for myself. At that time I needed to find a source for myself.'

Like all of the factory's new workers, when Madhu joined the company he harboured dreams of making this his 'track', of forging a career in the factory:

> Everybody went there expecting something. At the beginning everyone would work really hard, thinking that we would get something back from the company. I was like everyone else. I entered the company thinking that when I leave I want to be in a great position. When I come from this company – so when I retire, not old age, but when I leave the company, I wanted to be in a good position, to be … you know … [laughs] a manager, or whatever. You know, such targets will be like that, to be a manager. I wanted to be, not in the highest position, not an owner, but something like a supervisor or a manager in a particular branch. I thought that if I worked there for a long time, I would eventually become a permanent employee.

Like many other workers, Madhu carried with him into the SEZ a set of ideas about the dividends of hard work and the self-made man that were clearly passed from father to son:

> My father used to say, 'If an auto-rickshaw driver won the lottery he'd immediately go and buy a car or taxi for his son and tell his son to drive that and make money from it. But if the same auto-rickshaw man never won anything, but just worked hard, facing each and every problem as it came, until he came to a good position, he'd tell his son to work as he had, starting from the nothing and making something.' That's the character of my father; he wants me to work hard to achieve things. He tells me, 'Don't use the name of your father; you should get recognition under your own name, as Madhu, not because of mine. One day people will come to know about you, and I will get recognition as your father.' That is the way he has always been inspiring me. I want to work hard. If I can get 20,000 rupees per month I don't want it without working hard. I don't want to get something by sitting.'

Over time, like many other people, Madhu become disillusioned with what he saw on the factory floor and by the nature of competition between workers.

> There were very few possibilities for people. I saw only that people got promotions not by showing sincerity in their work but by polishing their superiors, you know, backing them up, always giving support to them from behind, even giving something to them.

After a year and a half his monthly salary was still Rs.1,200. He kept Rs.400 for himself and gave the remaining Rs.800 to his parents. 'I used to think if I can find another source that offers me 3,000 rupees I will jump from here. And if I had found one I would have jumped then and there.' The lack of any local alternatives, however, prevented many workers like Madhu from leaving Worldwide Diamonds.

Like many of Worldwide Diamonds' other employees, Madhu supplemented his meagre factory income with income from other sources. Workers in every one of the factory's sorting, sawing, cutting, and polishing sections added to their factory wage with other sources of income from the informal urban economy. These ranged from home-based tailoring and stitching to casual labour, loading and unloading trucks along the highway for scrap-metal merchants, door-to-door sales for regional mobile phone companies and insurance brokers, and providing hired muscle in low-level protection rackets for a small-time local *goonda* or *dada*. Before he joined the factory's workforce, Madhu had earned pocket money by giving homework classes to local primary-school students for an hour every evening. The school had been founded by a friend of his father whose son had been made headmaster, and Madhu was paid Rs.500 a month. After joining the factory Madhu continued to run these homework classes and, at the same time, began to offer after-school classes to children in the Gajuwaka neighbourhood where he lived. At its peak, close to 30 students congregated on the rooftop of his parents' house after school, where Madhu helped them with their homework in English and maths. 'My motivation was to mould the children,' he told me once, 'to make sure the children are on the right path.'

His classes also provided much-needed household income. This well-to-do area of Gajuwaka is populated with many employees of Visakhapatnam's large private-sector and public-sector companies who were ready to pay for their children to attend after-school clubs like Madhu's, with its scholastic bent. 'I did it just so that I was not sitting in a corner … but always doing something. Always earning something. After coming from the factory shift I used to come and do a shift here, at my school.'

The teacher

A labour strike, which closed Worldwide Diamonds for three months in mid-2005, ended Madhu's dreams of becoming a factory manager:

> One day when the strike was going I went to work and found that the company was closed. I thought, well even if it reopens I don't want to go back, because I don't like that type of instability and don't want to work in this kind of place.

Like many other workers, he never sent in a resignation letter or gave in his notice. One day he just decided not to go back to work. Some of his workmates came looking for him at home, and one friend who had also decided to leave urged him to hand in a formal resignation letter that would enable him to collect his outstanding salary and the provident-fund contributions that he had been making over the past year. But Madhu was proud and refused:

> I didn't want to go back there. I wasn't interested any more. A company should be like a mother to the worker. A company should think that the worker is their son and look after him and fulfil his needs. Why? Because the worker is working for the company. The company belongs to us. But this company doesn't think about people in this way. Instead it just makes people work, work, work, and gets profits from them. This company was never like a mother to workers, it was just like a commercial thing.

At first Madhu told me that he passed the days after leaving his factory job hanging around in Gajuwaka, playing cricket with neighbourhood kids and looking for work. But in the course of several conversations he allowed this fiction to slip. As it turns out, he had actually travelled farther down the coast, to the city of Vijayawada, where he had stayed with a friend for three months and found work as a day labourer on a construction site. Here he was out of sight of his father and neighbours:

> They didn't know how things were there. They couldn't see. They thought it was good. I didn't tell them about the conditions I was living in, or what I was doing. I didn't tell them what I was doing. It was … anyway, I adapted, just eating one or two meals a day.

He earned around Rs.600 a month and sent whatever he could back home.

Three months later his sister got him an interview at a school in Visakhapatnam and he came home. 'I've always been interested in education,' he said. 'I have always wanted want to learn more, to teach more, everything.' He remembers his interview in the Principal's office. 'Madam asked me, "What will you do if a child doesn't listen to you?" I told her that I would try to mould the child, and she asked me to show her what I would do.' He gave a demonstration class and afterwards was offered a position as the computer and drawing teacher for the school's youngest children, with a starting salary of Rs.3,500 per month. On his first day, he started cutting out coloured letters for 'Happy Teachers Day'. For several months he worked at the school from nine to five, returning home to Gajuwaka in the evenings to run homework classes on the roof of the family's house until 7.00 p.m.

His experiences on the construction site had been formative, and he began to incorporate elements of community service into his homework classes:

> When I was away I saw some of the situations up close that poor people face. Once in Vijayawada I saw a boy asking for food from other people, two people dragged him off, and then some hotel boys they gave him yesterday's food. Even yesterday's food he was having then. Suddenly it was raining, and then the bowl was full of rainwater and he couldn't eat anything. When I came back here I thought about that situation and decided to do some kind of service for children with my students.

He introduced a collection box and encouraged students to give small amounts of pocket money, which they saved up to give away. One year they bought school books and donated them to a local children's charity.

Madhu's tenure as a primary-school assistant lasted only a few months before an accident brought it to an end. In one account of experience in the school Madhu tells me that he had been so successful that he had quickly been given responsibility for the school's five city branches, that his salary had steadily increased to Rs.4,000, 5,000, and then 8,000, and that the school had eventually given him a car and driver. But in another version he revealed how the workplace had confronted him with the social politics of the labour market and the devaluation of his academic qualifications (cf. Cross 2009). Inside the school he worked alongside teachers with formal graduate and post-graduate degrees in education and was hurt by their failure to take him seriously or treat him as their equal.

> These days a 'plus two' education is not the basic thing. A degree is the basic thing, and because of that I wasn't allowed to teach the children. Instead some of the teachers used to treat me as a fool. I tried to give lessons to those students who had been naughty or committed some mistake in their class, but some of the teachers laughed at me and asked, 'Why is he giving lectures?' In the end I didn't like that environment.

The tipping point came following the news that a girl who had been the subject of Madhu's teenage affections was getting married to another man.

> He was working as a manager somewhere and getting more salary than me. I got an invitation to the marriage but I just threw it away and tied to erase all my memories of her. They got married on April 27th 2008.

Distracted and disturbed, Madhu fell into despair. One day he was walking along the side of a road in Gajuwaka thinking about what had happened, 'thinking about my future and things like that', when he walked into the road without looking and was knocked over by a speeding auto. 'It wasn't the driver's fault. It was my mistake. Completely mine. The leg was fractured, I had to have an operation and I was bed-ridden for three months.' The traffic accident allowed Madhu the chance to leave his teaching post with face, and he spent his days in bed thinking about what he really wanted to do – sing.

The singer

When he was in 10th standard, Madhu's maths teacher, Ravi Kiran, had encouraged him to participate in a school singing competition. He remembers the date precisely: 15 August 2001:

> Ravi Kiran Sir is my God. He always used to encourage me. He used to say, 'You've got a good voice, why don't you use it?', and he tried to push me to join the school competition. But I had no confidence. For humming purposes my voice was fine, but for singing I felt that there was something lacking. But he pushed me to do that, he said you have to go there. So one day suddenly I found myself on the stage and I was singing, a six-minute-long breathless song, a Lord Siva song, complete with classical words and everything. When I finished singing I saw that the audience was impressed and I thought, this is the thing that I have. From childhood I used to hum songs and everything. When this family took me in, I remember that after eating dinner we would sometimes sit around and sing, all sitting together. But I didn't know I had this thing until Ravi Kiran Sir drew it out of me.

Launching himself from this small school stage, Madhu had set his goals higher. In 2002 he participated in the Visakhapatnam district singing competition and won first prize. In 2003 he came fourth in a nationwide Hindi song contest held in Delhi. For three years these ambitions were put on hold, as Madhu's filial responsibilities and factory work suggested another kind of career trajectory. After leaving Worldwide Diamonds he tried again, joining Eenadu TV's Voice of Andhra Competition in 2006, but was eliminated in the third round. In 2008, as he recovered from his accident, he began to sing again, and in the following year he entered Eenadu TV's Saptaswaralu singing contest, winning a place in the final top ten. Later that year he was one of the finalists in the Voice of Vizag

competition, performing a selection of Telugu, Hindi, Classical, and Western pop songs to a huge crowd on Ramakrishna Beach. On the back of his success he was approached by a local music impresario with connections to the Rama Raju Film City in Hyderabad, the centre of the Telugu film industry, who invited him to lay down some backing vocals for a Telugu film score. 'The only thing you need is talent', Madhu said:

> You need to sing to tempo and to scale. It's very difficult. The classical way of singing is very different: you have to change the voice and the body language. In the song competitions, you really have to concentrate on the performance, you need to have a way of holding and catching the mic, a style of stepping, and you need to dance a little bit. You have to catch the beat, you need to give movement to the song, that's the thing.

When I met Madhu in 2009 his success in that year's singing competitions had catalysed his ambition. 'Right now,' he told me, 'my dream is for everybody to recognize me as a singer!'

> I want to be a good performer and I want to hear my songs wherever I go. I want people to listen to my songs in the street. And when I'm walking down the road I want to be able to hear people say, 'Ah this is Madhu's song'. I want people to recognize my voice and say, 'Ah this is the voice of Madhu, this is a special voice, a voice that no other singer has'. I want to be that.

Over the next two years Madhu travelled to Hyderabad to record four songs for Telugu movies. His change in fortunes was immediately apparent in 2012, when he picked me up from a dusty Gajuwaka bus stand on a gigantic blue motorcycle that drew considerable attention from local commuters. Now 24 years old, he told me that he could command Rs.40,000 for each recording and was regularly offered slots to sing at the gala functions organized by Visakhapatnam's upmarket hotels:

> I could always sense that I was going to reach something, that I was going to achieve something. But I never imagined it would happen in this way. I never thought I could reach this much. When I was a kid I had great dreams … first I wanted to be a doctor. Later on I wanted to be a pilot. But over time my dreams changed. According to my situation I changed everything. I changed my targets. I changed my attitude. Today there is only one thing left in my mind. I want to sing. From my childhood I thought about singing, but I never imagined that I would sing on stage or in a film. But that's happening now.

So promising did he consider the opportunities that he was thinking about moving to Hyderabad to pursue his singing career full-time, but he remained torn by commitments to his parents and to his students.

Madhu had used the money that he made from singing Telugu movie songs to restyle himself as a professional mentor or tutor for young children. His informal after-school class had been registered with the local government as a private educational institute, the 'Madhu Educational Society', and he had transformed the first floor of his parents' house into what he called 'my school'. A large billboard on the roof of the house welcomed people with the tag line 'The Complete Brain Train', and he claimed to have 120 paying students, most of them from Gajuwaka's industrial middle-class households. A glossy full-colour promotional brochure had been printed to advertise the institution, listing Madhu's achievements as a singer and listing the awards and prizes of his top students.

The purpose of his 'school', as Madhu described it to me, was to conjure in students the 'same love for knowledge' that he felt, and to share with them 'the lessons for following the correct path in life' that he had learned. More than anything he wanted to inspire them. 'Whatever dreams I have I want to inject them into my students', he explained. To this end, alongside giving assistance with their maths and English homework he organized extra-curricular cultural activities and led his students in doing 'service'. In 2012, they organized a slow bike race (in which the last comes first) for students in Gajuwaka and distributed books in the highway township's slums. Madhu had also transformed his parents' rooftop into a garden of potted plants that he hoped would instil in students a sense of the environment, and he was thinking about installing solar panels to teach students about renewable energy.

Nowhere were Madhu's projects for the transformation of the self more evident than on his old bedroom wall, where his motivational art installation had now been expanded. His room was now a dedicated classroom, and its walls had been re-decorated with educational posters and motivational messages. The scrappy pieces of paper had gone, and in their place were glossy English-language posters for students, one showing items of laboratory equipment and another showing parts of the body, and a series of smartly laminated boards with what he called 'lessons for living' (see Figure 7.2).

'Life is full of twists and turns. Being open to unexpected turns in the road is an important part of success. Just find your next adventure, enjoy it and achieve it', one of them read. 'Life is a market. All raw ingredients available. The only thing, we need to prepare the best of them', read another. 'Our dreams must be stronger than our memories', read a third.

Conclusion: dreaming and desiring voices

In genres of activist writing and journalism the representation of work and labour in India's SEZs frequently suppresses or ignores the dreaming and desiring voices and actions of young men like Madhu. Instead, in the representation of work and labour we can find what the philosopher Jacques Ranciere (1981) once lambasted as sepia snapshots of labour, full of nostalgic passion for traditional forms of labour organization and tender-hearted curiosity for the practised movements of the craftsman. For many critical commentators in India, industrial

Figure 7.2 Madhu's wall in 2012.

workers seem to be admired as long as they cleave to their collective identities – but they become suspect when they want to live like others, when they 'demand an individual wanderlust', or when they 'pursue the desires and passions that are associated with capitalism's ideological illusions' (ibid.: 248–9).

Madhu's story is his own, but the contours of his brief biography, his dreams and desires, are shared by a generation of young Telugu men who were born and brought up in north-coastal Andhra Pradesh and who have entered waged employment in the global factories being established in the region's SEZs. If Madhu's story sheds new light on their experiences, it does so by showing us how the political economy of contemporary India creates new arenas in which young people articulate their hopes and aspirations and attempt to fulfil their kinship obligations. The words and phrases that are projected on to Madhu's walls may reflect those of a dominant ideology, and a *Geist* or a spirit of capitalism, but they also capture the complex interior lives and personal histories of young men like him who are appropriating, inhabiting, and making use of managerial languages and technologies in ways shaped by but not always concordant with their resources.

8 Reality TV in India and the making of an enterprising housewife

Nandini Gooptu and Rangan Chakravarty

'Chief executives of the household'

Rama Bijapurkar, highly influential marketing consultant and best-selling author, argues that one of the most promising drivers of growth in the Indian consumer market is the 'changing attitudes of the Indian woman' (2008: 175). Among women, from a marketing perspective, 'housewives' are the most important group. As Bijapurkar (ibid.: 171–5) goes on to clarify,' "housewives" pretty much covers [*sic*] most adult women, since the age of marriage is still very low'. Further, she informs us, housewives 'see themselves as the "chief executives" of the household'. Bijapurkar dispels the 'myth' that the potentials of market expansion lie with working women, either those who are employed outside the home or those who are 'home entrepreneurs' running 'home businesses' or micro-enterprises from home. Referring to a song from the film *My Fair Lady*, she argues that the working woman is afflicted with the Henry Higgins syndrome of wishing that a woman would be more like a man at work,[1] while she 'tends to bend over backwards to play the traditional role at home'. Unlike these working women, Bijapurkar argues, an 'increasing number of *changing housewives* … have acquired the "working woman" mindset' (emphasis added). They are 'more entrepreneurial, and more gutsy about narrowing the gap between them and the authority figures in their lives'. In Bijapurkar's view, the changing attitudes of housewives have led to a 'change wave of womanism', which is 'a gentler and less individualistic form of feminism', with women seeing a 'less traditional' and more 'modern' and important role for themselves, while still remaining family-centric. The 'modern' element of housewives' attitude is explained as follows:

> Womanism is about women saying: 'I am a person too. I want my space and my place'; 'I want my opinion to count'; 'I want to be productive/do something worthwhile and remunerative'; 'I value my own time'; 'I need to look after my own interests too; there is no glory in self-denial.'
>
> (Ibid.: 174)

Bijapurkar is, of course, not alone in placing an emphasis on the housewife.[2] Characterization of married women, by Bijapurkar and others, primarily as the

CEOs of the home, who are also at the same time committed to their own self-development, may or may not be an accurate reflection of the attitudes of the so-called 'Indian housewife'. What is important here is that such construal of the 'mind' of the housewife or the home maker prompts advertisers and media producers to design their entertainment and marketing products to enhance women's supposed enterprising disposition in order to 'open new markets'.[3] The market-driven media politics of 'womanism' seeks to mobilize women for the market, not simply by direct promotion of goods and commodities, but by 'selling' an enterprising identity and a mindset. This chapter explores the politics of 'womanism' in the media and its interplay with the domestic politics of housewives.

'Womanism' and television

Television is by far the most important medium in which the ideology of 'womanism' is elaborated and offered to female audiences. It is now a commonplace assumption in the media world that women constitute the most important segment among television viewers. A vast range of programmes is, therefore, directed towards women. Rather than the depiction of women for the male gaze, images of women are now produced for the female gaze, albeit mediated through the logic of the market. As Munshi (1998) shows for Indian advertisements, ideas of 'traditional femininity' and 'liberating feminist' discourses are woven together to create a consumerist ethos around the image of the home maker. Michael Curtin (1999) has noted that, with the advent of the 'neo-network era of satellite and cable media', the range of images of women and femininity in the electronic visual media has been vastly expanded. Soap operas and serial domestic dramas, as well as advertisements for certain types of product, are dominated by images of female protagonists and by the so-called 'New Woman' (Bajpai 1997; Munshi 1998; Mankekar 1999, Chapter 3; Malhotra and Rogers 2000; Oza 2006, Chapter 2). The 'new' woman is, however, a contested category and interpreted in a number of different ways, ranging from elite, globalized, cosmopolitan, liberal women, at one end of the spectrum, to those, at the other end, imbued with family values, but considered to be 'modern' and liberated from 'tradition' because of their increasing assertiveness and their desire for an independent identity and a degree of autonomy from patriarchal control. In Bijapurkar's (2008: 172–6) formulation, the former are 'ultra-modern' and they are often professional working women, who may consume for their own personal needs; but the latter type of family-oriented, yet independent, housewives are the ideal consumers from a marketing perspective, for they consume a variety of products for the entire family unit, not just for themselves. The underlying foundation of the housewife's consumption capacity is her enterprising persona as a home maker, which leads her to make purchasing decisions to enhance all aspects of her home and the well-being of all members of her family. It is this fundamental enterprising orientation of women's mindset that needs to be nurtured and celebrated in the interest of the market, as Bijapurkar so lucidly observes.

Not surprisingly perhaps, as is now widely recognized, in their myriad domestic and familial roles on television, women are usually portrayed as being capable of exercising agency, making choices, and taking decisions. Whether they are endearing and attractive family-oriented wives, mothers, and daughters or exaggeratedly unappealing vixens and vamps, female characters are more often than not shown to be capable of stamping their will on the course of events and on the fortunes of other characters, for good or for ill (Bajpai 1997; Munshi 2010). Munshi (2010), in particular, has forcefully commented on the widespread depiction of strong and powerful women in prime-time television soap operas, some going so far as to contest patriarchy, although not all scholars agree with the latter proposition (Chakravarti 2000). Rajagopal (1999), for instance, has argued with reference to advertisements that women are depicted as being liberated from older forms of power relations within joint families, but their supposedly new independent roles are re-inscribed in the patriarchal nuclear family. As Bijapurkar points out, the family needs to be emphasized as the main site of enterprising action, self-expression, and self-fulfilment of independent women who, as 'modern' housewives, are expected to exercise their agency to mould their homes and the family. Media artefacts, of course, beam messages of consumption through the aesthetics of a programme which promote styles and fashion in clothing and home wares as well as lifestyle and leisure products and activities. Far more important, however, is the cultivation of an agency-oriented, enterprising image of women, intended to mobilize them as actors in the market, as Bijapurkar so convincingly argues.

While soap operas and serial programmes, as well as advertisements, mark a passive mode of engaging women as viewers, the rise of reality TV has offered a new format to draw in women as active participants in TV shows. Following the entry of commercial television and the proliferation of transnational and national satellite and cable channels since the 1990s (Page and Crawley 2001; Mehta 2008: 1–12), reality TV has emerged as the latest and highly potent weapon in their arsenal, from the early 2000s. This includes franchises of international programmes such as *Kaun Banega Krorepati* (an Indian Hindi version of *Who Wants to be a Millionaire?*) and *Indian Idol*, as well as various national and regional talent contests, game shows, chat shows, and makeover programmes (Ganguly 2010). Reality TV operates with a different logic from soap operas and serial dramas by permitting active participation. Game shows and talent searches not only promote competiveness that is conducive to a market ethos and a market-driven social milieu; they also articulate an ethic of self-making and the exercise of individual agency and responsibility for self-enhancement and self-actualization. As such, reality TV has been argued to be an archetypical device for the creation of neoliberal enterprising subjects and responsible citizens (Murray and Oullette 2004: 1–15; Lewis 2008; Oullette and Hay 2008). Personal makeover programmes and talent contests, quite literally, showcase the enterprising self. They present the enterprising form of conduct and the act of making an enterprise of oneself as virtuous undertakings. Reality TV epitomizes the ideal of enterprise by depicting ordinary people gaining

extraordinary competitive success by dint of their own concerted drive and effort, as well as intensive and arduous cultivation of their merits, talents, and abilities. Reality TV is also argued to represent a participatory, democratic culture by providing space for and access to 'ordinary' people and their views and emotions (Murray and Oullette 2004: 1–15). Contrarily, however, such participatory media formats have been seen to be a form of commercial exploitation of participants and viewers, and the commodification of the realm of the personal and the private, not least because the depiction of supposedly 'real' selves and scenarios is, in fact, a highly choreographed and engineered process (ibid.). However, rather than positing a rigid polarity between participation and exploitation, this chapter seeks to tease out whether, how far, and in what ways women who have entered the world of Indian reality TV might find it possible to rethink their own subjectivity and make their own meaning.

This chapter is based on research into Bengali-language TV that has played a leading and innovative role in India in producing women-centric reality TV, with the launching of *Rojgere Ginni* (hereafter RG) ('The Earning Housewife') in 2001. RG ran for nearly 12 years, until 2012, and proved to be not only highly popular but also one of the longest-running non-fiction programmes on a General Entertainment Channel in India. A number of other reality shows in Bengali also soon appeared on transnational, national, and regional commercial channels. The Bengali-language programmes featured in this chapter are not only more popular among Bengali women than Hindi or English-language shows, but are the only ones that Bengali-speaking women can participate in, due to their lack of fluency in other languages. With the devaluation of Bengali as a language of public use, and the ascendance of English as the language of upward mobility (Donner 2006: 383–6; Ganguly-Scrase and Scrase 2009: chapter 5), the mother tongue has increasingly become the language of the mother at home.

This chapter explores several reality shows, including RG, the idea for which was conceived by Chakravarty, one of the authors of this chapter, who provides insights into the production of RG. In addition, the director of another highly popular show (*Dance pe Chance, Boudimoni*) was interviewed for his perspective on that show. The views of housewives have been captured through Chakravarty's interaction with them during the process of producing RG. In addition, both authors conducted several focus-group discussions in Kolkata with housewives who either participated in television programmes themselves or whose children did so.

Domestic gender politics and housewives

The 'woman question' was at the centre of political discourse in the encounter between nationalism and colonialism in Bengal. In Partha Chatterjee's now well-known argument (1993, chapter 6), Indian nationalism, particularly in Bengal, posited the inner domain of the home as a pristine sphere of cultural and spiritual purity against the outer public, material arena, which was politically and culturally dominated by colonial power. This accentuated and exaggerated the distinction

between the private and public domains: the home and the external world. However, the reforms of women's position that were undertaken in the face of European criticism of the oppressive treatment of Indian women also led to considerable changes in domestic gender relations. Women's role was redefined in a new conception of companionate conjugality, with women perceived as the chief bearers of the task of preserving the sovereignty and sanctity of the private realm through the nurture of the family and children. While these conceptions may have been largely confined to the nationalist upper-caste middle classes, nevertheless they have provided a long-term ideological basis for the association between women's respectability and virtue with domesticity and a carefully protected private sphere. Bengali middle-class women are still largely seen as the bearers of domestic and familial responsibility, whether or not they work outside the home or play 'public' roles. This is not, however, a straightforward product of resilient and enduring gender ideologies. As Henrike Donner (2006, 2008, 2011) shows in her study of middle-class Bengali families in Kolkata, the post-economic liberalization period has seen an extension of women's domestic functions and, in particular, a significant enhancement of their maternal role to mould properly educated and healthy children, suited to today's competitive world. Women are now guided by new notions of choice, commitment, and responsibility, and they play an important role in the maintenance and improvement of the family's status and class position in a new consumerist milieu. In Donner's words (2011: 68), women 'are mediating the world of commodities and the demands of a "traditional" extended family setting', and 'the ideal housewife and stay-at-home mother embodies class status, ethnic identity and Indian modernity at the same time'. Ganguly-Scrase (2003: 562) notes a growing cross-gender consensus on the need for women's education, and an emerging desire on the part of women themselves for greater independence from family control, or at least 'to negotiate a space for themselves within their families'. It is in the context of this regional domestic politics of gender relations that Bengali-language soap operas and serial dramas, and latterly reality TV, have stepped in to embrace the Bengali housewife.

Rojgere Ginni ('The Earning Housewife') blazed the trail in launching reality TV involving women in 2001. It was the first reality game show that went into the home in quest of the housewife. Broadcast every day of the week until it went off the air in 2012,[4] it ran for more than a decade, with 3,528 episodes featuring as many housewives. The programme makers calculate that more than 35,000 women auditioned to take part in the programme, while around 300,000 women rang to express an interest in participating. In the early days of the programme, the TV channel received around 200 telephone calls every day from interested housewives. Faced with such high demand, the programme had to expand its geographical ambit to include various districts of the state of West Bengal, although it had been initially intended to confine filming to the city of Kolkata. The programme makers were also invited to produce shows in a similar format in other states of India and in other languages, which they did at four more centres: Jaipur, Patna, Lucknow, and Bhopal. RG has now assumed something of a cult status in Bengal, with the term 'rojgere ginni' entering everyday

idiomatic usage, and restaurants and manuals for women's micro-enterprise being named after it.

The programme was launched in the early days of the arrival of commercial satellite and cable television by a new private channel, ETV-Bangla, which was at the time seeking to break the dominance of the state-owned Doordarshan channel in evening television. Their budget was too low to compete with the prime-time Bengali serial dramas on Doordarshan, which ran between 7.30 p.m. and 10.00 p.m. They therefore targeted the 6.30–7.00 p.m. slot, which is thought to be largely, if not exclusively, a women's hour, before male members of the family return from work. This matched the advertisers' interest in reaching women aged between 24 and 50: in other words, housewives. The RG team decided to attempt the innovation of engaging women directly, rather than producing yet another fictional programme. Their plan was to go into the homes of women, where a programme anchor would talk to housewives about their lives and play games based on household chores, thus showcasing the apparently trivial skills of housewives, such as making tea, or ironing clothes, or chopping vegetables. The programme team took a conscious decision to attribute concrete value to housework, by offering substantial sums of money in prizes for the performance of familiar everyday tasks. The name of the programme itself signalled this: 'the Earning Housewife' could be seen as an oxymoron, as housewives are not considered to be income earners. Most housewives usually say, 'I do not work. I do not do anything. I am a housewife.' The games were not designed as serious tests of skill, but as ways to valorize the seemingly mundane work of the housewife and to give her an opportunity to win and feel a sense of achievement. The games traversed various spaces in the home, following the housewife's daily work routine. In games for the kitchen, the housewife would have to shell a given number of eggs or peel potatoes within a given time, and then win a cash sum if she succeeded. In the bedroom, she would have to make the bed or fold clothes to win another prize. Then the scene would move to the living room, where she would have to put covers on cushions in order to win again.

However, by entering the home with the housewife as the focal point of attention, the programme makers had stepped into the minefield of domestic and gender politics, where the norm is to mediate access to the housewife through male members, elder females, in-laws, and the larger family unit. The initial episodes of RG had a near-exclusive focus on the housewife, asking her questions about her joys and frustrations, her dreams and hopes, and her married life. With the show being filmed at home under the vigilant gaze of the family, more and more participants found it difficult to answer these questions, and many were worried about the consequences of speaking their minds in public. Moreover, it became difficult to sustain the show without involving the husband and the extended family, because their exclusion implied that the housewife was being given a preferred status and privileged recognition outside the frame of the family. As a consequence, the show underwent a significant change in its tone and content. From a show about the joys and pains of being a housewife, it became more of a documentation of the enterprise of home-building, and it

unfolded over the years as an unproblematic story of the home and the family. The show was structured to start with the individual woman, then move on to the couple and the story of how they met and married, and then conclude with the family. Games were devised to involve the husband and the rest of the family, including the relatives and in-laws with whom many housewives still live in a joint-family unit. While the first two rounds of games featured the housewife performing household tasks, the third round brought in the husband to play games together with the wife, to test the couple's co-ordination, compatibility, and knowledge of each other's tastes and preferences. The final two rounds brought in other members of the family, and the housewife would have to win memory games with their help, thus affirming the triumph of family values.

Although the show, by presenting the housewife through the lens of the family, compromised some of its initial intentions, it still marked a dramatic intervention in Bengal's middle-class domestic, gender politics. The show breached the ideologically laden public–private divide by going into the inner sanctum of the kitchen and the bedroom. It created the space for housewives themselves to reveal their own homes and their own family stories. This assumed a particular poignancy and meaning for women within a wider ecology of soap operas, domestic serials, and advertising which had saturated the visual media with idealized and desirable images of the home as a modern, attractive, glamorous space of domestic consumption and the site of family dramas. A motif of cash transaction and commodification, conducive to the ideology of market exchange, no doubt ran through the programme in the award of cash prizes for winning games. However, from the perspective of gender relations, the very fact that housework was being given a market value was a radical move. Indeed, many women were overwhelmed to earn their own money for the first, and possibly the only, time in their lives. Moreover, going beyond the idiom of the cash nexus, and far exceeding the intrinsic value of the monetary award, the symbolic significance was highly potent. It struck at the very foundation of domestic politics by acknowledging housework and 'ordinary' housewives as worthy of public recognition through media broadcasts in a star-dominated media culture.

Indeed, this appears to be the reason for the runaway success of the show and its popularity among housewives, both as participants and viewers, as revealed in their comments to the RG team as well as in focus-group discussions. Who were the women who participated in these programmes? From an entirely technical and logistical perspective, they had to live in homes with a dining table, on which the family games could be played, and with a 15-ampere electric plug socket, required to supply power to filming equipment. The selection was, thus, biased towards those who could afford a certain standard of living and lifestyle, which excluded the less affluent sections of the middle classes and certainly the poor. Many of the housewives were graduates, but no specific qualification was required for participation; they did not need to possess any performance skills, nor did they need to be appealing or glamorous in appearance, a quality usually associated with presence in the visual media. Most housewives were, thus, potentially suitable participants, although, like a marriage match, the selection

for the programme itself was likely to have been construed by the chosen woman as an endorsement of her qualities. The relatively easy access and opportunity to appear on television in a media-dominated world was no doubt one of the chief appeals of RG. But why did these women seize this opportunity with such enthusiasm?

In focus groups, women unanimously agreed that their domestic work and home management were not valued. Moreover, their needs, wishes, and views were neglected in almost all respects. One of them, who wanted to continue her studies after marriage, said that her marital family did not oppose her studies, but they expected her to prioritize the needs of her husband and the family at all times, even in seemingly trivial respects; for example, she was expected to fulfil the duty of a sociable housewife by joining the family in the evening to watch television, instead of studying; and she was told that it was unnecessary for a housewife to waste time reading the newspaper in the morning when she should be supervising breakfast. In the focus-group discussions, there was general consensus, allowing for the rare exception, that marital families were uninterested in the well-being of women. While housewives had to cater to everyone's every need, no one enquired about their needs, and all family members took the women's hard work for granted. Most women felt a lack of mental intimacy with their ever-busy husbands and mentioned that one of the greatest 'gaps' in their lives was the lack of anyone to talk to about their own feelings. Some claimed that even their own parents and natal family were only interested in ensuring that they would live harmoniously in their marital homes, and advised them to compromise and accommodate the needs of husbands and in-laws in the interest of 'family peace'. But, as one woman put it, family peace did not mean peace for herself, because she was always in a state of inner turmoil in attempting to please everyone else all the time. This inner unrest did not always entail major problems, but often related to seemingly minor issues or matters of apparently petty attrition, which nevertheless had major significance for the informants in the focus groups, especially in a context of women's changing expectations and desires. Among the examples that they gave were the battles that they had to wage to gain permission to wear the more convenient and manageable *salwar kameez* (a kind of dress worn by non-Bengalis and considered unsuitable for married Bengali women) on holidays, as opposed to the traditional *saree* of the housewife, or to persuade the mother-in-law to remove the family refrigerator from the bedroom of the young bride, so that she would have some privacy from the constant visits of family members. In a context of domestic politics of this nature, and with women nursing a sense of neglect and lack of empathy, RG offered an opportunity to housewives to feel a sense of self-worth and self-esteem. Typically a participant would say that the day of the shoot was the most memorable one in her life since her wedding. She was again the centre of attraction, and after many years someone was helping her with make-up and clothes. Professional people had come in with a camera, lights, reflectors, and special props to create an entire show, of which she was the central character: the heroine.

The commercial logic of the show implied the commodification of the private sphere of the home. Nevertheless, the women participated eagerly in the transgression of the public–private divide. This is hardly surprising, given that in the supposedly private sphere of the home, these women feel that their own personal space is denied, violated, or encroached upon. As focus-group discussions revealed, from the women's perspective, in the 'private' home, they lead a 'public' life in the service of family members, and have little or no autonomous time or space of their own. In this context, RG recast the home as a space belonging to housewives, reclaimed it back for them as their own project, and gave the home and the housewife public acclamation. The show ascribed hitherto unrecognized value to these women and their home-making enterprise, rather than presenting them as the idealized cultural and spiritual essence of community identity, as in the erstwhile nationalist formulation. Further, the domain of the home and the work of housewives received visibility in a new context of media dominance and celebrity culture. This in itself could be seen as a form of recognition and vindication of one's worth. Even if it was only for an unusual moment that an individual housewife enjoyed public approbation for the duration of the programme, the significance to her far exceeded the actual event, because she found the opportunity to express and present herself in a new light. As home-making is the only career option for such women, the home is the sole field of enterprise in which they must excel to prove their worth to their families, to society at large, and, most importantly, to themselves. The eagerness with which these young, educated women aspired to appear on the show clearly underlined a desire to make themselves visible, along with the homes that they had built, and the tricks of the trade that they had mastered. Whatever may be the reality behind the show, RG was the shop window where they could flaunt the successful product of their enterprise: a happy family and an ideal home. The housewives were content to submit themselves to a larger social gaze and the institutional gaze of the family, represented by thousands of other housewives – the viewer-judges. The games in RG were not difficult in any way and were simply played for fun. They were devices to hold the narrative together and take it forward from the individual to the couple, and then to the larger family, to build a happy familial space within the duration of the show. There were no serious challenges that could upset the happy and celebratory spirit of the show. There were no demanding games for the couple that could raise doubts about their compatibility. All games were designed to support and uphold the myth of the family, with the housewife as its lynchpin, in a way that 'real' life never does. Even if the happy home was a charade, it vindicated the myth lived by the housewife, and celebrated the personal home-making enterprise of each individual housewife – an enterprise that is otherwise given little social credence and value.

As for women viewers, they too appreciated the valorization of housework and home-building which, by implication, enhanced their personal self-esteem and confidence in their own enterprise as housewives. Here was a programme that showed a normal home and another woman like themselves. 'I like to see someone like myself on television. I like to see how she does the work that I also

do; her home, her family, their interactions, the interior decoration.' The audiences watched this show to inspect closely how other women 'really' lived and to compare and contrast those lives with their own. The housewife's clothes and jewellery, her husband's looks and manners, the age difference between the two, the size of the apartment, the quality of furniture, the taste in décor, the amenities in the kitchen – all came under close scrutiny. The viewers were themselves vicariously implicated in the show. It played out a powerful politics of representation that is different from the depiction of the home and housewives in serial dramas or advertising. The domestic setting created in every episode of RG was a 'real' representation of the lives of the women viewers, and in every show they were being represented by 'real' women like themselves; the shows held up a flattering mirror to them.

The winning mother-and-child partnership

If RG went into the home to put the ordinary housewife in the limelight, other programmes sought to draw them out into talent contests, to show not only their own talents, which will be discussed below, but also their children's. Here reality TV harnessed by far the most important role that housewives play: that of bringing up children in a highly enterprising mode. Donner's (2006, 2008, 2011) studies of middle-class women emphasize their maternal role as the single most important aspect of their lives. The mother, usually an educated woman, is no longer a mere carer, but she actively shapes her children's life chances by helping to prepare them for an increasingly competitive world. She involves herself directly and actively in her children's educational process and manages their daily routine of tuitions, private coaching, and other activities. In focus-group discussions, several women mentioned that for school admission, mothers are now interviewed in preference to fathers. Most agreed that they prioritize the needs of their children over those of their husbands and families. One mother said that she has a personal sense of failure and feels almost suicidal when her child does not perform well in an examination, and she knows that the family blames her for 'her' failure. The mother here virtually fuses her own identity with that of the child by measuring her own success and failure by her child's performance. This comment also reveals that, despite her overwhelming personal investment in the child, her authority and role vis-à-vis the child remain ambiguous. Even though she takes the initiative in her child's all-round development, she has limited autonomy in making choices for the latter, in which the father and the extended family take precedence. That their role is devalued in such a way is a source of much dissatisfaction and contributes to a sense of injustice among mothers. The wife remains ultimately answerable and accountable to her husband and the family in ensuring that her maternal role is fulfilled properly, and, of course, she is open to social scrutiny. Her own self-worth and sense of fulfilment, then, depend on helping the child to succeed on the terms set by the family and wider society.

Recognition of the mother's indispensability in ensuring her child's success and achievements is the core idea that underpinned the talent-contest show *Star*

of Bengal, launched in 2008 by the Zee-Bangla channel. The show featured child participants between the ages of ten and twelve years. The contestants would go through a number of competitive rounds that tested their aptitude and skills in dancing, singing, games, sports, and quizzes. Most importantly, the children were paired with their mothers, who were to guide them through the various rounds. This programme, in a microcosm, vindicated the singular importance of the mother in steering her children towards success in their lives, irrespective of the father, family, and genealogy. It emphasized her enterprising maternal role as motivator, coach, trainer, and partner, far beyond being a mere carer or nurturer. If RG had reclaimed the home back for the housewife, *Star of Bengal* asserted the sovereign right of women to supervise child-rearing and parenthood, in preference to all other kin and family.

While in *Star of Bengal* women themselves stepped on to the stage in reality TV, offering support to their offspring in public, in numerous other cases mothers now play a very similar role behind the scenes to motivate and prepare their children for talent contests featuring dance and music, with a large number of such shows being broadcast throughout the year. Children attend auditions, and if they are selected, they spend several weeks, even months, away from home in the television studios and the associated training and coaching units, being groomed and prepared for the shows. Since fathers normally have employment commitments, mothers usually accompany these children and stay with them for the duration of the talent contests, not only as their guardians but also as a source of encouragement, support, and motivation. Producers of these programmes, however, comment on the ferocity with which parents frequently upbraid their children for not performing to their full potential, or for making mistakes. Contrary to many accounts of such talent and game shows exploiting their participants, the mothers in our focus-group discussions firmly supported these programmes for reinforcing their own projects to give their children the best life chances. They claimed that these talent search programmes, as well as other TV shows in which they participated, improved their children's 'grooming', self-presentation, and public persona, all of which combine to create a much-valued personality-enhancing quality that is believed to facilitate progress and mobility (see McGuire in this volume). The mothers welcomed the competitive spirit and ethic of achievement-through-hard-work that these programmes instilled in their children, thus equipping them effectively for future life in what mothers see as a cut-throat society, with an uncaring, cruel state. These comments reflected the pervasive fear of downward mobility among Bengali middle classes that has been widely noted (Scrase and Ganguly-Scrase 2011: 124). 'Nothing is handed on a platter today, so you have to struggle'; 'children need an armour' to survive and succeed. The 'armour' consists of education, but that is not considered sufficient. One needs extra-curricular accomplishments, as well as mental skills and character traits, such as competitiveness, self-sufficiency, determination, and exposure to a wide variety of experiences. The opportunity for their children to develop enterprising selves is clearly one of the motivations for these enterprising mothers to support their offspring in taking part in shows of various kinds.

Many mothers stated that they were also using this opportunity for their own self-enhancement, by stepping out of the control of the family while accompanying their children. Families that are normally conservative about women's freedom of mobility would allow them to go out with their children to schools and other public spaces. In this process, women develop a degree of autonomy from family control. They also meet other mothers and forge a wider network of friends and confidants. In this way, women create alternative spaces and relationships beyond the ambit of the family and the husband. In a similar manner, while accompanying their children for TV performances, they embrace the opportunity to get a glimpse of a different life, especially the glamorous world of the media, to which they would otherwise have no access. Many said that they felt like frogs leaping out of their well, referring to the idiomatic usage of 'frogs in the well' as a metaphor for extreme insularity. Such exposure to the wider world and new, unfamiliar, and exciting ideas and experiences 'refreshed' their minds. Participation in reality TV has thus afforded them the opportunity to augment their children's skills and personality, as well as to enhance their own selves.

A space of one's own

It is in that spirit of self-enhancement and self-fulfilment that women have themselves entered talent shows and game shows. This would have been difficult to envisage in 2001, when *Rojgere Ginni* launched the first reality show and had to take the camera to the home of the housewife; but now, more than a decade later, women-centric reality shows, based in the studio, are legion. Not all Bengali housewives may wish to find a role outside the home, but those who participated in our focus-group discussions expressed their desire to 'refresh' their minds, and to get to know the world beyond the home. In a number of different ways, the media, including reality TV, have provided an opportunity for them to do so. Programme producers are always in search of participants for the burgeoning number of shows. Relatively easy access to, as well as the intrinsic attraction of, the visual medium has encouraged women. The success of shows like RG and the growing visibility of 'ordinary' people on television have invested reality TV with respectability. Indeed, appearance on reality TV has come to be seen as a source of recognition and status accretion, not only for the individual concerned, but for the whole family. One housewife mentioned that in today's world only 'film stars and ministers have power', thus pointing to the crucial role of the media, alongside politics, in conferring power, status, and reputation. 'There are thousands of doctors and engineers; who knows about them? But if you are on TV you are somebody; everyone sees you, admires and envies you.' In this context, middle-class families have permitted housewives to participate in reality TV outside the home. The exposure gained by the housewives through their media participation, and the new networks and contacts that they help to construct, are seen as family assets. One woman who came to a focus-group discussion related that her appearance in a reality show subsequently led to further

work on television, as a consequence of which her worth within the family had substantially increased. Not only was her talent appreciated and her income gratefully accepted by the family, but she began to be consulted on major family decisions. The notion of the ideal housewife appears to have changed here, with new enterprising qualities relating to the outer world being valued, and her domestic role being extended to cover new areas.

The talent-search programme *Prathama* ('The Foremost or Best Woman'), on ETV-Bangla, articulated these shifts. It was conceived as a tribute to women's many qualities that often go unrecognized, and as a celebration of their excellence, both inside and outside the home. The show highlighted non-traditional gender roles, such as social work, micro-entrepreneurship, professional achievements, talent in performing and fine arts, as well as the more usual home-management skills and physical appearance. Non-domestic roles are also played out in *Didi Number One* ('Sister Number One'), on the Zee-Bangla channel. This is at present one of the most popular programmes in the 'woman's hour' slot. As in the case of *Prathama*, the title of the programme signals women's superior status and excellence through the use of the terms 'Number One' and 'Didi', which literally means elder sister and is used as a respectful form of address for women. The fact that the current female Chief Minister of the state of West Bengal is widely known as 'didi' perhaps lends further authority and stature to the title. It is a studio-based game show, usually with three or four housewives in each episode, but their domestic skills are not on parade here. Like RG, easy games and instant prizes drive the show, but importantly, this programme is about the housewife as a person, and not about her domestic skills and accomplishments. The contestants are first called upon to demonstrate a practical skill through a game, and then their intellectual ability is tested by being required to speak on a given topic for a few minutes, by answering questions in a fairly easy general-knowledge quiz, or by solving puzzles. They are then asked to sing, with the help of an invited guest who is a professional singer. In the final round they are shown a number of products of personal use, such as clothing or jewellery, as well as household goods, ranging from home-decoration accessories to expensive consumer durables. The programme anchor then reads out riddles, which describe each of these objects, and the contestant who guesses the right answer wins that item. Depending on the overall scores of each contestant from the previous rounds, they also win further prizes that are donated by commercial sponsors of the programme. This is clearly a blatant attempt to promote consumption by displaying and promoting goods and products. However, as in RG, women find an opportunity to present themselves in a celebrity mode on TV. At the same time, they are also able to win valuable goods and products for the entire household in their own right. This emphasizes the women's role beyond domestic work, their contribution to the family economy by securing consumer products through the excellence of their performance, and particularly their brain-work, as demonstrated in solving the puzzles.

The reality talent contest that has taken Bengal by storm in recent years, and has been marked as a 'TRP topper',[5] is *Dance Pe Chance Boudimoni* ('Take a Chance on Dance, Dear Sister-in-law'), launched in 2009 on the Rupashi Bangla

channel. The show has so far featured a few hundred women, and thousands have auditioned. According to the director, the show has included women from all sections of society, from the daughter of a domestic servant to women of affluent families, coming from households with incomes ranging from Rs.2000 to Rs.200,000. Described in a newspaper as the programme of the 'dancing homemaker',[6] it is promoted by the producers as 'a platform … to bring out their hidden talents which they have not been able to nurture because of their domestic responsibilities'. The show is only for married women, who perform a dance routine based on Hindi or Bengali film songs or folk songs. Participants usually have some prior training in dance, but they do not need any special qualifications. Many contestants do not have the figure and form seen on films, but anyone who wishes to dance is permitted to enter the audition, irrespective of her physical appearance. Once selected, a contestant spends weeks at the studio where the programme is filmed, being coached by professional trainers. This culminates in the actual performance, where the participant appears in full glamorous attire, with professionally provided make-up and costume, on a glitzy stage with sound and light effects. A wildly cheering studio audience, including members of the family, greets their performance. The anchors of the show are young men, purporting to be the brothers-in-law, who cajole the 'sisters-in-law' (*boudimoni*) of the show's title to reveal their hidden dancing talents. Despite the fictive kinship terms, the housewives here are not presented in their domestic roles as wives or daughters-in-law, but in terms of a relationship that has a risqué hint of sexuality and extra-marital attraction. Moreover, the housewife here is projected as a performer in her own right, who is given the space to present herself in glamorized and sexualized ways. Ten years after *Rojgere Ginni*, a very different incarnation of the married woman is presented, suggesting that glamour is achievable by all, even by someone without the perfect idealized body. The show conveys the message that it is possible to realize one's hidden dreams and ambitions, and gain recognition for otherwise ignored talents, without being fettered by social, familial, and cultural constraints.

The publicity for the show states that it is for the *shadahron meye* (ordinary woman) 'who does not know French or German, but who knows how to cry', implying the genuineness of participants' emotions as well as alluding to the pain and sorrow of their lives. The director explained that the key ingredient of this programme was 'emotion'. Even the fact that someone was not very good-looking or proficient at dancing could be turned into an asset by emphasizing the 'emotional factor'. The programme is structured to introduce the dancer and her background, including her home and relatives, and the contestant then speaks of her own dreams and ambitions, and the constraints that have hitherto prevented her from pursuing her dreams or developing her skills and talents; this prepares the ground for a cathartic emotional outburst after the performance as she revels in the sheer delight of accomplishing the unthinkable task of successfully dancing on stage. Women are depicted in many different emotional modes. Maternal love and concern is, of course, one of them: one contestant said through a veil of tears after her performance that she had neglected and missed her little

daughter during the weeks of training, after which the daughter appeared on stage with the mother-in-law and did a few brief dance steps herself. The mother-in-law then hastened to add that her daughter-in-law is usually devoted to housework and to the family. More than maternal or marital dutifulness, however, other emotions were highlighted. One contestant was conferred the sobriquet *kal baishakhi* or a summer storm, to denote her whirlwind energy and dynamism; *jed* or determination to succeed and wilful self-belief were identified as the strengths of another; the epithet *abhimani* (proud) was applied to one to denote that she was too proud to give up and pursued her dream despite others' attempt to belittle her. These are not qualities that would normally be seen in a positive light for housewives, whose valued attributes are dutifulness, docility, and obedience. Evidently, the programme exploited women's sentiments, and packaged them in essentialized emotional ways for commercial success. Such 'commercial distortion of the managed heart' (Hochschild 1983: 22) configures the mode of women's self-realization and self-fulfilment by managing emotional expression – in this case, hyper-emotionalism and the outpouring of private feelings in public. Despite this, however, the show offered to women a sense of possibility that they could develop their 'hidden' selves. Moreover, as some contestants put it, when they dance on the stage they forget about everything else and are wrapped up in a world of their own. Paradoxically, the public stage has provided a private space of their own to these women, which they lack at home, as seen above. If RG struck at the public–private divide by showing the home in public, *Dance Pe Chance* now appears to have elicited new ideas about the meanings of the private and public, with the latter marked as the domain of personal self-realization and self-actualization.

However, this show (like RG or *Didi Number One*, as well as other talent contests) does not seek to subvert the gender hierarchy; instead such programmes buttress the ideology of the intrinsic superiority of the family, and continue to uphold and celebrate female virtues and qualities, including emotionality. These shows are Janus-faced – they present women in their singularity as individual contestants, but re-inscribe them within the family by various means. Women contestants, before or after their performance, are now shown routinely to sing fulsome praise for the support and encouragement that they receive from their families, husbands, and in-laws, suggesting that their individual achievement is in fact a triumph of a family project. Shows regularly focus the camera on seemingly adoring and fawning family members in the audience who seem to share the pain and the joy of the contestant. Husbands, in-laws, parents, and children are called up on the stage to say a few words, allowing them their own moments in the limelight. Even the much-maligned mother-in-law seems eager to bask in shared glory with the daughter-in-law. The director of *Dance pe Chance Boudimoni* acknowledged that there were frequent episodes of tension and conflict with families behind the scenes, but that no friction was ever shown in the programme. The emphasis was resolutely on the joyous outpouring of ecstatic emotions. On his part, this was a pragmatic move to avert any confrontation with the families and to avoid public controversies on the show that might have

undermined its popularity. At the same time, of course, the ideology of the family and the home needs to be upheld as the primary site of consumption.

Conclusion

Analyses of the media usually focus on images and audiences, but not on participants. In the context of extremely rapid expansion of reality TV, the significance of participation is important to grasp. For female participants, reality TV has provided a crucial site for the re-signification of gender relations and the renegotiation of domestic politics. Moreover, the visibility of 'real' and 'ordinary' women on reality TV has opened up a space of imagination for women as viewers to contemplate new roles and possibilities, far more than the fictional, fantastic world of films and soap operas could possibly do. This chapter began with the market imperative for mobilizing women as enterprising housewives through the media. In keeping with this, reality TV clearly seeks to 'sell' new identities to women, and evidently succeeds, as seen above. This raises the question of whether the structural logic of the market taints and undermines the personal experience of emancipation and reconstruction of subjectivity that market processes unwittingly bring forth. Are the goals of market intervention neatly aligned with the outcomes that are produced, thus amounting to a new subjection of women to the market? Consistent with the goals of market-driven media politics of 'womanism', women are forging new subjectivities to make an enterprise of themselves, their children, and their families, but these processes far exceed their market-designated meaning and purpose. In the interstices of market processes, the rules of the domestic game are changing. Spaces are becoming available for women to craft new identities for themselves, and even to develop a sense of agency, empowerment, and freedom to engage with the wider world. However, while the norms of patriarchal hierarchy and gender relations are perhaps being rendered less rigid in this way, they are by no means revolutionized. Moreover, structural inequities persist because the ideology of the family endures and is indeed reproduced by the market as a crucial site of consumption.

Notes

1 R. Bijapurkar and C. Iyengar, 'Vive la Difference!', *The Economic Times*, 8 March 2006, available online at: www.bijapurkar.com, accessed 16 February 2013.
2 See references to marketing surveys on housewives in Srivastava 2007: 281–2; Munshi 1998: 577; Krishna Naik and Reddy 1999: 25; Sengupta 2005: 109, 126.
3 Bijapurkar uses this formulation in another context, while discussing how to draw poor people, whom she renames 'modest income consumers' or MICS, into the ambit of the consumer market. See 'New mindset to open new markets', *The Economic Times*, 2 March 2012, available online at: www.bijapurkar.com/consumertrends/ct_new_mindset.php, accessed 14 July 2013.
4 Initially the programme ran on weekdays, and subsequently on every day of the week.
5 'Bangla Boom', *The Telegraph*, 14 April 2010, available online at:www.telegraphindia.com/1100414/jsp/entertainment/story_12335226.jsp, accessed 3 April 2013.
6 Ibid.

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Part III

Contestations and contradictions of enterprise culture

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9 Aspirational regimes

Parental educational practice and the new Indian youth discourse

David Sancho

Introduction

The most recurrent stereotype of Indian youth describes this generation as always studying or working hard and endowed with overflowing ambition, aspiration, competitiveness, and confidence.[1] Priti's father, whom I met during field-work in a southern Indian city, once illustrated this idea by comparing his own childhood with that of a 'school girl' today:

> Today, a girl studying in eighth standard can talk about what she wants to be. She would say I want to be a doctor, an engineer. The modern generation has got awareness and lots of opportunities and lots of avenue too. Those days [when he was an eighth-standard student] it wasn't like that; simply, you studied.

This statement typifies the profound optimism that almost always imbued parental assumptions about the economic prospects of young people in the 'New India'. Parents whom I interviewed envisaged a bountiful terrain of employment opportunities in India and abroad, and imagined a highly rewarding field for individual creativity, innovation, leadership, and hard work. Many quoted the now-pervasive cliché 'the sky is the limit' when talking about their children's prospects, projecting a sense of confidence similar to the 'culture of magical belief' surrounding the IT industry that Peter van der Veer (2005) describes. This vision was often reinforced by narratives of the past as a time when employment opportunities were very limited, and there was a distinct lack of ambition among young people.

Data collected between 2009 and 2010 among middle-class parents and high-school students in urban Ernakulam, central Kerala, led me to interrogate this public imaginary of entrepreneurial youth in a time of opportunity, and to explore whether it actually reflects families' everyday lived experiences. In particular, this chapter examines the way in which the language of enterprise recasts parental engagement with formal education and the domestic politics of education among a group of middle-class families. It focuses on households of markedly different socio-economic positions within the middle social spectrum who

nevertheless send their children to the same private school, the highly reputed English-medium Brahmacharya Vidya Mandir[2] (BVM henceforth). I will argue that, despite their differences, parents converge in similar authoritarian educational practices aimed at ensuring their children's educational success and entrance into specific professions, perceived as secure and as garnering substantial wealth in the global labour market. In particular I examine three commonalities: the choice of school, investment in entrance coaching[3] (EC henceforth), and decisions regarding career options.

More importantly, I demonstrate how this authoritarian and intensive parenting is both imposed and disguised through widely circulated discourses about modern Indian parents as being 'detached', and new Indian youth as the epitome of the enterprising citizen: one who is not only fiercely ambitious, but also self-disciplined and driven by individual initiative. The articulation of parents' authoritarian projects through a neoliberal discourse that celebrates individual youthful entrepreneurship is what I describe as parental 'aspirational regimes'. Finally the chapter reveals how these shared regimes not only mask their authoritarian character behind a facade of freedom, but also conceal varying degrees of uncertainty and anxiety experienced across households, thus serving to reproduce social inequalities while helping to cement tropes of the enterprising Indian self.

In what follows, I draw ethnographic sketches of a number of families in order to illustrate the variety of backgrounds of the school's intake. Subsequently I elaborate on parents' educational narratives and practices concerning schooling, EC, and career preferences. I draw primarily on two sources: first, a number of in-depth interviews conducted with BVM parents; and second, a survey that I conducted in the neighbourhoods surrounding the school.

Ethnographic sketches

Balraj, a 17-year-old Hindu Nair in Class 12, played football inside and outside school whenever the hectic routine of the final year allowed it. He dreamed of being able to play football professionally, but more realistically liked the idea of pursuing a degree in hotel management and becoming a chef in a hotel. Half way through his twelfth class, his parents allowed him to nurture that interest by not 'going deep into it' (i.e. by avoiding the matter). Balraj's father (BSc Physics), who runs a small business selling medical equipment, claimed to have entered a 'confused stage' about Balraj's future after school. His 'problem' was that Balraj's marks were not very high; 'they are not that encouraging'. As the end of Class 12 approached, Balraj's parents became more anxious, because decisions at this stage were seen as decisive in determining his future life. As his parents put it: 'There will be no return; it will be a one-way path.' They felt unsure about the appropriateness of a career in hotel management. They saw it as limiting the 'opportunities of growth' through a lifetime that they wished to pass on to him. 'We are putting pressure on him to improve his performance in the exams', his parents said towards the end of the academic year. While Balraj's future seemed

puzzling for his parents, his older sister's trajectory, at the time doing a BSc in Medical Technology at a private college in Pune, fell more in line with their parents' business and aspirations. In the end, Balraj joined a hotel-management degree programme in Mumbai, while his sister graduated and returned to Ernakulam to work in the family business.

Priti, a Tamil Brahmin, was aged 16 at the time and a pupil in Class 11. She was enrolled in one of the two computer/mathematics groups available in school.[4] This was the most sought-after, and hence competitive, higher secondary division. It was understood to lead to the most coveted professional degrees, namely IT-related engineering courses. Priti aspired to gain admission to an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), and was without a doubt one of the most hard-working students in the batch. At weekends she attended one of the main providers of EC in the city. Even when at school, she devoted every spare moment to keeping up with the demanding EC assignments. Priti acknowledged the advantage of being exposed to EC and valued wholeheartedly the financial effort that her parents made in order to pay Rs.35,000 for the two-year course. Although she found the institute's methods to be harsh at times, Priti valued 'the advantage of knowing the kinds of questions they give at the IIT entrance exam'.

Priti and her family lived in a small house near the school. Priti's mother, a mathematics and education graduate, was a housewife. Her father (BCom) retired from Godrej (one of India's major privately owned companies) as a finance manager. After he had completed his pre-university course in Madurai, his parents (Priti's grandparents) pressured him to quit studying and work in the family's small business. With 11 siblings, most of them younger than him, he was expected to contribute to the family's income. While helping in the family's business, he took courses in shorthand and typewriting, as well as a course in wireless operation/Morse code, aiming to find clerical employment or a job on board a merchant ship. After holding several small clerical posts, Priti's father returned to college, completed a degree in commerce, and secured a more stable job in Godrej. He always dreamed of being able to say he was a university graduate.

Ajit, in the eleventh standard, was a fresher at BVM. He grew up in a Bengali family settled in Mysore, in the southern Indian state of Karnataka. Ajit, his parents, and younger sister were relocated to Ernakulam in May 2009 because of his father's job as a planner for Hindustan Unilever. Upon arrival, Ajit's parents relied on the advice of local acquaintances to shortlist the best possible schools. Ajit was placed in the same EC as Priti, as they had heard of its professed high success rates in helping students to succeed in competitive examinations. However, Ajit's father told me:

> In today's scenario whatever he requires, he has to pick it up himself … parents are far behind the present generation's knowledge; we are not in touch with the day-to-day knowledge; we are always busy with our existence in the office. So, what we are doing? We are only spending money and trying to put him in the right place, and it is up to him how far he can grow … they are on their own.

Throughout the academic year Ajit struggled to pass term exams in most subjects. Not knowing Malayalam, the local language,[5] and not having enough time and energy to study after attending EC, his academic performance was seriously undermined. Towards the end of the academic year, Ajit's parents pulled him out of EC in an attempt to help him pass the eleventh-standard examinations. But a few weeks later, Ajit was once again attending EC. He seemed disillusioned, yet resigned to his parents' decision, and acknowledged that otherwise it would entail a 'waste of money'; Ajit failed Class 11.

Vijay, an upper-middle-class Nair (upper-caste) boy, lived with his younger brother and parents in a sumptuous flat near the school. His parents were successful business people, owning an advertising company and a rice mill. He was one of the few students who participated in the expensive student-exchange programme run by BVM. Vijay belonged to what some of his peers called the *English-speaking gang*: those who communicate in English among peers. He was an asset to the school for his English public-speaking skills, which he had developed at a young age when his parents enrolled him in English oratory classes. His sharp and eloquent use of the English language was at the school's disposal for all kinds of events and interschool competitions, and as such he was one of a few boys who served as the public face of the institution. These activities, he confessed, provided an excuse for his less than impressive academic performance, which Vijay simply attributed to sloth, although he explained that 'you can't ever say you are lazy'. When asked about the future, Vijay said that he would be content to study for any business-related degree and then work in his parents' business. However, his parents effectively compelled him to 'learn science' in school and seek what they saw as more ambitious educational objectives: an engineering degree, followed by a Masters in Business Administration (MBA). In 2011, Vijay completed his first year of an engineering degree programme at a renowned college in Tamil Nadu.

Ernakulam middle classes

Schools like BVM are social nodes in which the various middle-class 'tiers' coexist (Fernandes and Heller 2006). They agglutinate families from established middle-class backgrounds who have, for several generations, enjoyed maximum-achiever status and inherited privilege from their upper-caste and urban forebears.[6] Such schools also attract families who have more recently gained access to the material lifestyles generally understood to be middle class. Having attained this economic base via education or/and migration, they now set out to reconvert their economic capital into higher forms of educational capital, which they will aspire to reconvert once more into greater prestige and economic gain.[7] Through education, these families attempt to (re)produce wealth and prestige that can be transmitted to the next generation. Despite their disparate class positions, their expectations of their children were not discernibly different from those of more established middle-class families.

However, the families of BVM pupils differ from each other in many ways. In terms of employment, BVM parents constitute a pool of skilled, educated, and

employed people at various levels. A large proportion of my informants' fathers worked in public industries, in positions ranging from semi-skilled labour-intensive posts to managerial positions. Another group of informants' parents worked in the private sector, either as entrepreneurs or as salaried employees. Among entrepreneurs, most ventures were small-to-medium sized. Another cohort of fathers[8] consisted of former migrants to the Arab states of the Persian Gulf. Being skilled or professionally qualified, unlike the majority of migrants to the Gulf,[9] they had managed to maintain long-term contracts and visas. Having spent considerable periods of time in the Gulf, some of them with more than 20 years abroad, they had amassed considerable wealth, which was regularly remitted to their families in Ernakulam. Most of these Gulf migrants were high-status Christians or high-caste Hindu Nairs who, thanks to their privileged economic and educational backgrounds, had access to overseas jobs and could afford the considerable amount of capital needed in the initial stages of migration (Osella and Osella 2000: 79). A final cohort of families was that of the most affluent and established upper-middle-class households, characterized by parents in the most coveted professions (engineers, medical doctors, and lawyers) and entrepreneurs. Most of the families oriented their children's education towards acquiring the sort of prestige and wealth that this last cohort of families stood for.

The choice of school

For middle-class families, the choice of formal education for their children is among the most important factors in improving their children's prospects for the future (Kumar 2011). Having consolidated wealth in previous generations, the families described above were in pursuit of 'maximal achiever status' (Osella and Osella 2000). In Kerala, since the expansion of the colonial administration in the nineteenth century, English-medium education has been central to attaining this status, not only as a primary marker in and of itself, but also as the means to attain highly coveted forms of employment, which throughout most of the twentieth century has meant jobs in public administration. These created the economic and cultural basis for groups of higher-caste and urban dwellers to rearticulate their privilege as successful members of the middle class (Kumar 2011: 224). Today, employment in public administration is losing its glamour vis-à-vis positions in the private sector, especially within the field of engineering. The attainment of maximal middle-class status is supported by the child's success, or destroyed by the child's failure to acquire the necessary skills and credentials. As elsewhere in India, parents live in hope that their sons and daughters will somehow (re)produce that position in the employment hierarchy, and they realize with increasing urgency that to do so they must ensure the right education for their children (Parry 2005: 297).

For the majority of parents who participated in this research, the reputation of a school is primarily based on its ability to produce excellent academic results in board examinations and in the subsequent entrance examinations leading to professional degrees. Thus, in choosing a school for their children parents try to

maximize the children's chances of success in terms of their future professional careers. This is not to say that the school's academic results are the only criterion for choosing a school: other criteria such as distance, facilities, or religious affiliation are also important, but these are secondary by far, compared with academic results, and even more so as sons and daughters approach college age.

Parents and students keep track of schools' performance in board examinations, and the news of top performers or IIT entrants quickly becomes public knowledge. In 2009, BVM received an extraordinary number of applications after a student named Rajan came second in the nation-wide Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) tenth-standard examination. Such information circulates so rapidly that even before I met Rajan or attained access to BVM, I had already heard of his achievement from students of other schools. In choosing schools according to results, parents typically end up incurring high expenses, often reported to be beyond the means of the family, because schools command a high price for their education as they become more successful at producing high-ranking students. A mother put it this way: 'If the results are not good, the school will lose that student; every management tries to improve results, and they take different fees according to performance.'

Families make many sacrifices in order to support their children through their education. Apart from fees, they have to pay for books, stationery, uniforms and other supplies, tuition, and leisure activities. There are also the spatial and nutritional needs of students, which are imagined to be more crucial than the needs of young people engaged in non-academic activities (Kumar 2011: 230). A great portion of the family's functioning and routine is designed around giving the child time and support. Parents often wait for their children to come home to supervise their home assignments. Priti's mother described how she provided Priti with every single item of food that she asked for, as soon as she could, and she laughed at the fact that Priti did not know how to cook anything.[10]

Such reports were often accompanied by a parental discourse of inadequacy. Many parents portrayed themselves as being comparatively uneducated in today's subject-fields, and therefore unable to help their children to succeed in school. Thus they increasingly relied on filling their children's agendas with coaching and extra-school tuition to improve their prospects in competitive examinations (Kumar 2011). Ajit's father portrayed himself as unable to ensure his son's success except by spending money.

Simultaneously, parents actively sought to instil in their children a 'sacred responsibility' to succeed (Kumar 2011). In twelfth and eleventh standards, this mission became extraordinarily relevant. Priti's father described how they had inculcated in her the idea that studying is her work, and good marks her pay, aiming in other words to teach her to be self-motivated and to take responsibility for her own success. Other students described themselves as being under 'house arrest', which meant that their parents had prohibited leisure pursuits such as access to mobile phones, internet connection, and TV for the duration of the final year. Most young people co-operated with their 'house arrest' and internalized the mission to succeed because of the successful combination of discipline,

aspiration, and sometimes blackmail deployed by parents (Kumar 2011: 222). At the end of the year, some even talked about putting themselves under house arrest. In this sense Kumar (2011) notes that the middle-class child is educated twice, not only in the content imparted at various educational institutions but also into a particular disposition to seek success.

The result was that among many parents and their children there emerged a discourse and actual experience of the 'self-sacrificing parent' and the 'dutiful progeny': *par excellence* a middle-class discourse (Kumar 2011). In the context of Kerala, Devika suggests that this idea of productivity, 'of obedient, useful, productive subjects', as 'the norm by which the quality of domestic life was evaluated' (Devika 2007: 57) is not new. This understanding of modern domesticity is indeed linked to the making of a Malayalee middle class since the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, a process by which the labour of women in the domestic domain was tied to the production of modern subjects. While the idea of the dutiful progeny is not completely new, what is new is how this discourse has been oriented towards the globalized economy, and in particular to the belief among parents that there is no limit to what their children can achieve. In contemporary Kolkata, Donner (2006) has revealed similar mothering practices among middle-class families. She shows that in the wake of globalization and the integration of employment markets into worldwide discourses of skills and mobility, middle-class mothering has been reoriented towards supporting children throughout their educational career, and hence towards producing future white-collar workers for a global economy (Donner 2006: 378).

Entrance coaching

As students approach the crucial examinations at the end of their school days, parental anxieties and their efforts to facilitate their children's success intensify. The rising numbers of aspiring middle-class families (Donner and De Neve 2011) and the limited openings in the most sought-after colleges have resulted in a swelling demand for Entrance Coaching (EC) centres. Enrolling one's children in these centres has in turn become a marker of middle-classness. Apart from investing in expensive private schooling, parents increasingly rely on EC that is specifically geared towards preparing young people to take entrance examinations for competitive professional degree courses.

The vast majority of the students with whom I worked attended at least one EC course in institutes in Ernakulam or beyond. In the EC lessons that I audited there were more than 50 students crammed in a classroom, while I heard of lessons with up to 100 students in other centres. With yearly fees ranging between Rs.30,000 and Rs.60,000, parents chose EC for their children on the basis of criteria similar to those used for choosing schools: primarily the institute's ability to produce successful exam takers. There were some students who attended coaching centres in Kottayam, a city 65 km south of Ernakulam, just for the sake of attending a centre with the best record in a particular examination.

The format and content of tutorials vary widely and are adapted to the capabilities and desires of individual families. Centres offer courses starting from the primary, secondary, or higher secondary levels; a choice of weekday courses and weekend courses; and 'crash courses' immediately before entrance examinations. EC centres set frequent mock examinations, after which marks and feedback are given, and revision classes are scheduled. In Ernakulam these centres have rapidly increased in numbers and visibility: its roads are lined with EC publicity, which often includes photographs of their most successful students.

While the majority of parents whom I interviewed saw EC education as an important complement to their children's school education, some saw EC as actually more important than school education. These parents endorsed the notion of better education as 'better coaching' to do well in crucial examinations, and attributed the growth of the EC industry to what they saw as a 'lack of support' from schools, which they accused of failing to prepare young people effectively for the sorts of questions formulated in competitive entrance examinations. Their children often agreed and regarded coaching centres as of paramount importance. These pupils argued that school is about cramming facts or 'mugging up', while they described EC centres as teaching them how to solve 'HOT' (high order of thinking) questions, which were said to be 'application-level' questions that made them think and apply concepts to real-world problems. Like Priti, these young people devoted the majority of their time to studying and completing the assignments given them by the coaching tutors, and they devoted less energy to school work.

Many BVM parents also valued entrance coaching positively for the level of discipline that they believed it instilled in students: something that they felt was being undermined in school. They viewed with scepticism some of the changes taking place in formal schooling, like the introduction of 'child-friendly' approaches or holistic evaluation schemes.[11] Balraj's father, for example, spoke of 'expecting much more' from the level of discipline enforced in the school. 'They don't impose much on students; there is no pressure given.' He recalled the 'gap' that existed between students and teachers in the past, whereas now 'that relationship [of friendship between students and teachers] is spoiling the discipline of the school'. By exposing their children to the stricter regime of coaching centres, parents sought not only to educate their children in the actual contents of the course but also to inculcate in them self-discipline and respect for hierarchy, as well as teaching them how to manage 'pressure', generated not just by the burden of a heavier workload but also by the competition among peers that is encouraged in these centres.

Others, however, were ambivalent about the need to burden children with EC lessons; yet they felt the pressure to conform to what has become a norm. Thus sending children to coaching centres for them was not a matter of desire but one of necessity, in order to maintain their social standing. In this sense, middle-class status demands practices and levels of consumption that are in tune with 'the times', meaning that one must maintain the higher standard of living that upward mobility and the availability of new consumer goods have made 'normal' (Van Wessel 2004: 97). An important reason why EC has become a 'requirement' is

the fact that competition for social status demands possession of consumer goods. Two of the parents whom I interviewed illustrated this point by using the Malayalam expression *nadodumbol naduve odanam.* Often translated as 'when people are running, you should run in the middle', the proverb makes the point that one should always strive to assimilate to the norm. Although some parents deplored the educational workload imposed on children, they were nonetheless chained to it, for it was as if their children's competitiveness was always hanging by the slenderest threat (Parry 2005: 290).

'We are only spending money' – and the self-reliant youthful person

Both the domestic practices related to education, and the choices of school and EC, which constitute a great deal of what Donner (2006) terms the 'pedagogising' of the home, are the main means through which parents exert a kind of 'intensive parenting' (Davies 2004). Davies argues:

> Parents who hire or desire tutors are not overly busy but may in fact be more intensely involved with their children's education. Tutoring may be purchased by parents who are actually more closely involved with their children's homework schooling.
>
> (Ibid.: 239)

Entrance coaching and 'systematic' studying at home are, for parents, an alchemy that produces maximum-achiever status. Through these, it is thought, 'the sky is the limit'.

Even though the lives of most BVM pupils were governed by their parents' educational expectations and by their efforts to develop self-motivated, self-disciplined, self-reliant, and competitive characters, parents deployed narratives of contemporary youth as 'being on their own', which effectively disguised their intensive parenting. As Ajit's father put it: 'it is up to him how far he can grow'. These narratives depict an idealized past in which members of the family provided the necessary support to children's school careers. As Priti's father said, the family 'would never allow anyone to go astray'. It was claimed that elder siblings, cousins, or aunts always made sure that children studied every lesson, while now youth are said to have to fend for themselves. Parents in my study portrayed themselves as powerless, their only means of putting their children 'in the right place' being their ability to 'make money' and 'spend money'. Throughout my fieldwork in Ernakulam, teachers, parents, and students alike contributed to an omnipresent view that in this generation it is up to the individual to work, learn, aspire, and achieve.

Teachers and school staff reproduced this discourse and claimed that the mushrooming of coaching centres was a response to the lack of family support for pupils' everyday study needs. The popularity of EC is seen as evidence of the stereotype that modern parents are overworked and thus have no time or

energy to look after their children. This belief is the most recurrent basis for schools' critique of contemporary parenting. In my interview with BVM's director, he blamed many parents for failing to co-operate in the education of their children. Parents are said not to convey moral values, but to leave children exposed without limits to valueless TV channels. He portrayed parents as neglecting family life and excessively focused on their professional lives, thus echoing negative stereotypes attributed to the modern family across India (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007). But if we scrutinize parental engagement with their children's education, we see that while parents are indeed busy, young people are far from being left 'on their own'. Moreover, as Priti's father's educational trajectory shows, extended families were not always supportive of children's education. As has been shown elsewhere in India, in extended families it is typical that only the youngest sibling is encouraged to continue his or her studies, while others are made to stop studying and start working or looking after younger siblings, many of whom are in fact left alone from a very young age (De Neve 2011; Parry 2005).

By disguising intensive parenting practices behind narratives of making and spending money, parents in effect helped to craft a pervasive, idealized image of contemporary youth as self-reliant, under stress, self-motivated, and highly ambitious individuals: characteristics said to be lacking in the previous generation. By discursively placing the responsibility for 'growth' on their children, they sought to shape and educate them into the now normative subjectivity of the youthful enterprising Indian person. Parents helped to cement this notion by juxtaposing it with idealized memories of their own school and college years. Their generation was often characterized as being 'relaxed', 'enjoying', and concerned with 'playing only', while their children's generation is said to be obsessed with studying, and innately ambitious. Ambition, to which I now turn, was always marked by the quest for professional careers.

Career choices

As with practices relating to school education and entrance coaching, decisions concerning higher education were also a site of parents' aspirational regimes. Parents' preferences for higher education were driven by a desire to guide their sons and daughters into careers with 'opportunities for growth'.[12] Having benefited from higher education and having accumulated wealth, BVM families now aspired to achieve (or maintain) the locally coveted professional status. This meant that parents almost unanimously expected their children to pursue professional degrees (engineering, medicine, chartered accountancy, or law), locally seen as the sources of wealth and status *par excellence*. In addition, a large number of parents agreed that an engineering degree should ideally be followed by an MBA. A twelfth-standard female student put it succinctly:

> Now those who get BSc Physics don't get jobs; now a BTech (engineering degree) is actually the minimum qualification, then you have to add an

> MBA. You should start from the BTech, the basic degree, that's what my parents tell me.

For parents, professional qualifications constituted the apex of a hierarchy of degrees interlinked with local class hierarchies. University degrees in the arts and sciences, which most parents had themselves acquired, were marked as conferring less status and fewer opportunities for economic gain. Parents who, for example, got a degree in commerce from St Albert's College, one of the oldest and most prestigious colleges in Ernakulam, regarded the college as a place with little status. One parent explained that today only 'local mallus'[13] attend that college. Those people, he said, 'still have that mindset; they want education for the sake of it'. These 'local' colleges are now 'secondary', he continued, 'for lower middle-class people'. Diametrically opposed to these degrees and colleges, professional degrees are seen as markers of middle-class status, and more importantly as signalling a sense of 'awareness' that characterizes the modern middle-class person. 'Awareness' referred to a sense of goal-oriented ambition and competitiveness that shapes one's educational aspirations and leads one to prefer avenues offering 'real' growth (not just education for the sake of it); such aspirations are, of course, unaffordable to the bulk of society.

The majority of parents whom I interviewed sought to instil in their children a desire for professional degrees. However, parents always spoke of career choice as being a decision left entirely up to their sons and daughters. Similar to the narratives of 'being on their own', statements like 'whatever they choose to study, they will study' immediately came up during interviews with parents. These modern idioms of individual ambition and freedom to choose effectively concealed parental authority and the rather limited list of degrees endorsed by parents. Ajit's father, for example, explained that as a commerce graduate, he could not have really informed Ajit's aspiration to pursue a medical career, although he had put pressure on his son to attend a year-long EC course geared towards medical-college entrance examinations. This in turn portrayed his son in terms of the most pervasive stereotype of Indian youth today: the belief that this generation is one of overflowing ambition and determination, rightly personified in Lukose's concept of 'Zippies' (2009: 4).

While parents in effect steered children towards very specific and apparently secure higher-education degrees, those understood locally as conferring status and real growth, they often spoke of the current economic context as providing a multitude of 'avenues' and opportunities for growth. Priti's father explained that with India's integration into the global economy there has been:

> [a] great change in opportunities, now there is no stoppage! Earlier, in our days, what it used to happen was after graduation you went off to get a government clerk job. You learned some typing so that you can do some letters and correspondence and all that, and join a government organization as a typist. Then you get a promotion and become a senior clerk. Like that it was the ambition. Those days we used to think like that, now it is not so. Now

> there is no limitation; if one student wants to do anything, he can go up to that goal. If he really wants, he can go wherever he wants. 'The sky is the limit.'

As with Priti's father, there was an almost pervasive belief among parents that in neoliberal India young people's talents and aspirations can be unleashed, for there is no limit to what they can achieve.

On 'success' and 'failure'

In the final stages of the final year, the majority of young people did, to a large extent, embrace the study regimes, career aspirations, and stereotypes of ambitious youth that were circulating in urban Ernakulam. However, their co-operation with aspirational regimes was far from straightforward. While some embraced them almost without any problems, others struggled to exercise the degree of determination expected of them. Well into the twelfth standard, Vijay, for example, explained that he saw no point in being ambitious, competitive, and studying hard in order to gain access to a computing/mathematics batch. He felt that if he could start again he 'would have taken commerce in a heartbeat', for courses in commerce are considered to be much easier than science streams. He felt that his future was secure within the family venture, and believed there was not really a need to struggle with science subjects and rigorous, daily entrance-examination training, which he described as 'hellish'. Vijay said:

> My dad is having a good business, but he told me that there is more than making money. I would be fine just running his business, making lots of money taking my son on trips. He told me I have to achieve more. He told me to better get over the suffering part as soon as possible, learn science now and not when I'm a grown up, it'll make things easier then. Then an MBA is pretty easy compare to this.

For Vijay's parents, parenting was about nurturing enterprising selves, inspiring hard work, learning, and ambition through a regime that made youth embody those very same values. In the end, Vijay continued to attend EC and got admission to a reputed engineering college.

For others, the struggle to personify the vision and ambition expected of them was a source of distress. Parvathi kept disassociating herself from the professional ambitions that her father envisaged during our interviews. She refused to embody the farsighted determination expected of her, thinking of degrees, careers, and possible substantial salaries. She limited herself to talking about short-term objectives such as passing Class 11. Murali, a twelfth-standard Nair boy, recalled how, since his childhood, his parents, uncles, and aunts had posed the question 'What are you going to become, an engineer or a doctor?'. He spoke of the anxiety that this question had always produced in him. Murali, like many others, wished he could pursue a career in music, but he resigned himself to doing an engineering degree.

What happened to students who did not conform or internalize the values of ambition, self-motivation, and responsibility for their own success? As Kumar (2011) and Fuller and Narasimhan (2006) point out, 'failure' in competitive entrance exams and subsequent job applications is more frequent than 'success'. In India, failure is interpreted through what Kumar terms the dual discourse of the child and childhood (Kumar 2011: 237), which, as I hope to have shown, inflicts a kind of symbolic violence on young people in two respects: 'at the one level, childhood is unmarked and undifferentiated, and children are theoretically the same in that they are malleable and formable' (ibid.). They are a stone to be sculpted, and private schooling and coaching are indeed parents' sculpting tools. Education is understood as capable of changing a person intellectually, psychologically, socially, and emotionally (ibid.). Conversely, the discourse is one of the individual youth as essentially unyielding to being taught. Failure here comes to be interpreted as a reflection on the individual youth, rather than on the family. Ajit and Balraj illustrate the violence at both ends of the discourse.

A fresher at BVM and new arrival in Ernakulam, Ajit was struggling to cope with school and entrance coaching. By mid-term it was clear that EC, which took up most of the afternoon, was undermining his ability to pass school examinations. He failed all but one of the mid-term evaluations, which he attributed to the fact that entrance coaching drained all his energy. He explained that by the time he got home at seven in the evening he could not get himself to concentrate on studying. In the middle of the term Ajit's father made him stop attending EC. Instead, 'my dad is asking me to come up with a concrete plan of what I want to do in the future and a concrete plan of studies for each day', Ajit told me. But three weeks later Ajit's father changed his mind and insisted on the inclusion of EC in his son's daily routine once again. Ajit's father insisted that through systematic studying and time management he could succeed both in school and at the coaching centre. Sending him to EC was also a way for Ajit's parents to monitor his efforts, for they felt that Ajit might not be 'mature' enough to study in an unsupervised manner at home. In the end Ajit failed the eleventh standard.

Unlike Ajit, other young people who did not achieve high marks were not subjected to parental authority in the same way. For example, pupils who failed to gain entrance to a science group (and hence ended up in the stigmatized commerce group), or who generally performed poorly at school, were often marked as essentially lacking intelligence, what was locally referred to as not being 'bright' (the English word was used). 'Bright-ness', the main manifestation of which was high test marks, was often talked about by parents as a sort of intrinsic quality that individual young people either lacked or possessed innately. Balraj's parents saw him as not being quite bright, which they saw reflected in his 'not that encouraging' marks. Thus, until the very last stages of the twelfth standard they showed a lack of concern and effort to mould Balraj into a competitive student. Balraj had already been labelled as a failure. Parents such as his still tried to inspire their sons and daughters to get higher marks, but they put much less pressure on them than they exerted on 'bright' youth. Balraj and his elder sister illustrate this point. Their parents expected much less of Balraj, who

showed signs of slackness, than of his elder sister, who attended EC, got a professional degree in north India, and now worked in her parents' business. In short, parents adjust the intensity of their expectations according to what they perceive to be their children's individual qualities and eagerness (or lack of it) to embrace the exigencies that come with the competition to succeed.

Confidence and uncertainty

Recent works on contemporary middle classes in India have argued, in quite opposing ways, the degrees to which anxiety or confidence constitute a substantive feature of being middle class (Fuller and Narasimhan 2007; Liechty 2003). BVM parents tell stories at both ends of the spectrum; however, their almost seamless aspirational regimes concealed their differences. Among the households that participated in my research, there were some families, like Vijay's, who belonged to the most privileged fraction of the middle classes. They easily matched the income, housing, consumption, and confidence levels of the most idealized images of the Indian middle class. The ways in which Vijay inhabited his own body, dressed in branded Bermuda trousers, flip-flops, and t-shirts, rambling along the street waiting for his Labrador dog to sniff the kerb, embodied a sense of security similar to the IT professionals described by Fuller and Narasimhan (2007). The way in which he, in perfect English, spoke of his already laid-out educational trajectory, ending in a job in his parents' enterprise, transmitted a sense of confidence and security about the future, which was unthreatened by the imminence of highly competitive entrance exams. Vijay's confidence derived from having a habitus attuned to the multiple spheres of social competition, which in turn allowed him to succeed routinely within these spheres, thus giving him even more confidence (Jeffrey 2010: 20). This confidence emanated largely from his family's economic capital, which could easily get him access to the desired professional degrees in the event that he failed to attain access on merit.[14]

Despite facing the future with such confidence, having to take very little risk, and not being particularly preoccupied by the costs of professional degree courses, parents like Vijay's still invested heavily in schooling and EC. Sending one's children to these institutes is seen as a key instance through which responsible parenting is established, as well as a sound investment in further prestige. The possibility of gaining the prestige derived from securing a merit-based place in one of India's top institutes of technology is always taken seriously.

At the other end of the spectrum, less privileged families experienced more anxiety concerning their children's educational and professional prospects. Among these families there was much more at stake in their sons' and daughters' performance in board and entrance examinations at the end of the academic year, by which they would attempt to secure one of the few merit-based places available in the fields of engineering, medicine, chartered accountancy, or law. Anxiety in the domestic sphere surfaced in many of my interviews. Securing their families' respectable professional status was more dependent on

the young people's performance than in the case of wealthier families. In the case of failure, these families would have to either relinquish their aspirations or struggle harder to raise the money and somehow afford their children's professional education. For their parents, the investment dimension of costly private education and EC was obviously more significant than the socially conspicuous element of it. At home, parents demanded more hard work and systematic studying and repeatedly strove to impress upon their sons and daughters the degree of financial struggle implicated in sending them to BVM and EC. This worked as a way of making them aware of their share of responsibility for their family's strategy of upward mobility. Many young people, like Priti, embraced this anxiety, while others refused to partake in this responsibility and just concentrated on their personal struggle to complete school. In short, the aspirational regimes here described were sites for the making of middle-classness, bringing together families who safely inhabited this social position and others who were anxiously in the process of constructing and securing their middle-class status.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined the domestic politics of education among a group of middle-class families in urban Ernakulam. In particular, I have presented a set of common parenting practices with respect to school education, entrance coaching, and higher education, which show that far from being detached and 'only spending money', contemporary middle-class parents actively attempt to govern the lives of their sons and daughters according to their own educational expectations. These practices, combined with a series of discourses depicting Indian youth as being self-reliant and ambitious, constitute what I have described as parental aspirational regimes. More importantly, this chapter demonstrates how an enterprise-focused imaginary is invoked to justify parental regimes of authoritarian control over children's educational training and choices. These regimes, far from contributing to the creation of independent-minded, self-reliant individuals, in fact paradoxically seek to create conformity, discipline, and risk-averse life trajectories which, even if emphasizing a competitive and performance-oriented mentality, are ultimately geared towards ensuring middle-class status aspirations. Finally, this chapter has shown how middle-class educational regimes paradoxically help to conceal and hence reproduce inequalities within the socio-economic spectrum of the middle class: from the comfortably rich, who envisaged the future with confidence, to the struggling and aspirational families, for whom uncertainty loomed ahead.

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Notes

1 See Lukose (2009) for a thorough discussion of this.
2 A pseudonym.
3 Entrance-coaching centres are institutions specially geared to preparing students for entrance examinations to the most prestigious institutions to study for the most sought-after university degrees.
4 There were two computer/mathematic groups, one biology/mathematics group – seen as linked to the medical profession – and one commerce group. The latter carried negative connotations. Commerce students were seen as failures, as the majority of students in this batch had failed to get a place in a science batch.
5 Although BVM was an English-medium school, substantial parts of lessons were often delivered in Malayalam.
6 For a detailed literature on the upper-caste stature of the new educated classes of the nineteenth century, see Joshi (2010) and Misra (1961).
7 This confirms Bourdieu's idea that capital has a multiplier effect, being convertible and reconvertible from one form of capital to another (Bourdieu 1990: 118).
8 This was an exclusively male phenomenon.
9 These have been described as semi-skilled or unskilled migrants who are male, typically under the age of 35, unmarried, and with an education at or below Secondary School Leaving Certificate (Osella and Osella 2000: 78).
10 As a way to support children through their educational careers, children's domestic labour was remarkably underutilized, as also observed by Parry in the context of Chhattisgarh (2005: 287).
11 The dominant discourse from educationists in India and central-government education organizations is to reduce the levels of stress and anxiety experienced by students' exposure to external examinations.
12 The aspirational regimes here described were to a large extent ungendered, involving similar practices, rhetoric, and expectations for both boys and girls. There were, however, some nuanced differences, which I examine elsewhere (Sancho 2012).
13 This is a derogatory term for Malayalees.
14 Extensive literature has shown how the highly privatized professional higher-education sector favours those with purchasing power, turning higher education into a site for furthering already existing social difference and exclusion (Jeffrey *et al.* 2004; Salim 2004).

10 Youth and the practice of IT enterprise

Narratives of the knowledge society and the creation of new subjectivities among Bangalore's IT aspirants

Nicholas Nisbett

Introduction

> How much money can we keep spending on software to get a job, Nicholas?
>
> (Karan, 26, engineering graduate and IT aspirant)

A young Tamil man and a key informant from my fieldwork in Bangalore, Karan, like many of his peers, had undertaken a raft of software courses at private IT institutes around the city, only to find his hopes of a software job and, later, a 'call-centre' job, repeatedly denied. His frustrations at being unable to join others like him in Bangalore in accessing the capital, status, and possibilities for consumption that such jobs enabled was palpable throughout my fieldwork. But that did not prevent him from successive attempts to attain his IT dream through ever-more promising courses in the various programming languages that he hoped would lead to a software job. Even when we last communicated, nearing the age of 30 and relatively successful in his job in a products-design company, Karan still talked of further software training as an easy escape into a better-paid and higher-status job.

Impelled by India's success in the global software and outsourcing industries, and spurred on by the highly visible consumption habits of young men and women who have gained access to these new forms of labour, there are many young people like Karan who are growing up aspiring to work in these new and dynamic sectors of India's economy. In their hundreds of thousands every year, young people are gaining qualifications and 'certification' in the hope that these will serve as entry points into well-paid jobs. Ranging from a short course in IT literacy at a back-street IT school, to a degree in engineering or a Master's degree in Computer Applications from a prestigious Indian Institute of Technology, the dreams of the many aspirants are varied, but they are all based on the same presumption of social mobility achieved through education and access to the new forms of labour enabled by global networks of information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Such Indian middle-class dreams of IT success are echoed in both national and global discourses of technology, progress, and consumption, centring on the idea of the 'knowledge society' and its many variants. Knowledge, technology, innovation, and human capital are here seen as the key drivers of a globalized economy in which we understand the 'action of knowledge upon knowledge itself as the main source of productivity' (Castells 2000: 16). Proponents within India were quick to spot the global potential, where failure to reach the heights of the industrial age would be quickly addressed through the country's abundant reserves of both knowledge and human capital. One of its greatest champions in the early years of the millennium, President Kalam, discusses the innate abilities of Indians to do knowledge work, inheriting strengths from ancient India (itself 'an advanced knowledge society') in 'many intellectual pursuits, particularly in the fields of mathematics, medicine and astronomy' (2002: 119). According to Kalam, India simply needs to harness the minds of its many young people in order to become a global 'knowledge superpower' (2002: 196).

This chapter is not intended as an analysis of the global and national discourses of development expounded by Kalam and others, even though it takes them as its starting point. The focus instead is on my (mainly male) informants in Bangalore and their own experience of the knowledge society. Through examining the narratives of young people aspiring to work, and actually working, in Bangalore's software and outsourcing industries, I aim to show how they articulate their own discourse of the knowledge society or 'IT dream' as central to their middle-class projects of progress, status, and modernity. Inherent throughout these projects is a wider ethic of the enterprising self (Miller and Rose 2008: 194), functioning to help normalize (in the sense of desensitize, obscure, or misrecognize) the reality of individual and group trajectories through a newly flexibilized labour economy.

The fieldwork for this chapter was conducted as part of doctoral and postdoctoral research on IT use and IT employment in Bangalore from late 2001 to the end of 2002, and subsequently in late 2005 and early 2006. I focused primarily on a group of young middle-class men who would 'hang out' in a cybercafé in an area of north Bangalore that I call Lakshminagar. Here I learned about their attempts to enter Bangalore's IT and Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) employment markets. They came from no single 'community' or location, but from several different parts of Bangalore; and they were primarily (though not exclusively) Tamil-speaking, from Christian, Mudaliar, and Scheduled Caste backgrounds. Individual life histories are illustrated within the chapter, but as a whole, with most fathers working in permanent salaried jobs in north Bangalore's larger private- and public-sector industries, they may be considered as representing the sons of Holmström's industrial workers of Bangalore in the 1970s (Holmström 1976). In many cases, finding their way barred from entering the same industries as their fathers when recruitment slowed or ground to a halt following the post-liberalization reforms of the 1990s, they turned inevitably to the rising industries of software and outsourcing – where it seemed that everyone in their north Bangalore, English-educated, middle-class

milieu would know someone who had found one of these highly paid, high-status jobs.

Rather than focus exclusively on these young men here, instead I weave their narratives with those of other informants in Bangalore: from an IT course, where I spent nine months learning the languages Java and SQL; from another cyber-café; and from workers and managers in other outsourcing and software firms. The intention is to combine these keenly felt aspirations to work in IT with the narratives of those who had reached varying degrees of success in attaining this IT dream. The results shed light on how the ethic of the enterprising self takes on a key role within the discourse of the 'knowledge society' for India's middle classes. The entrepreneurial aspirations exhibited within my informants' narratives are revealed as both tenacious and malleable – shaped initially around the narratives of India's successful entrepreneurs in the software and outsourcing sectors, but re-forming around individuals' own experiences, regardless of whether initial aspirations are frustrated or fulfilled.

The Indian middle classes and the IT dream

Much has been written and debated about the way in which, in the liberalized Indian economy, growing access to global flows of goods, capital, and media has produced a middle class increasingly focused on material consumption and the aspiration of others to gain this consumerist lifestyle (for example, Fernandes 2000a, 2000b; Dwyer 2000; Mazzarella 2003; Lakha 1999).[1] The middle classes have also been seen as a powerful force in the political landscape, shaping both electoral outcomes and nationalist rhetoric (Hansen Thomas and Jaffrelot 1998: 15; Hansen Thomas 1998: 306; Corbridge and Harriss 2000: 124, 126 – citing Jaffrelot 1996), so that even the once-reluctant Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was forced to shed its opposition to globalization in its misplaced embrace of the rhetoric of *India Shining* (the slogan for the 2004 National Democratic Alliance election campaign), which was meant to appeal to the booming middle classes and draw on imagery of IT success.

On an individual and family level, this discourse has fed into thousands of variations of what I call the middle-class IT dream. An ideal type reads as follows: a young man or woman from a 'humble' middle-class background succeeds at school and enters a prestigious technical institution, such as one of the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or a regional engineering college. On completing the course, they are snapped up through campus recruitment by a well-known multinational software company. They pursue a successful career abroad for a number of years before returning triumphantly to India, perhaps to direct operations for their parent company, or invest their hard-earned money in a nascent Indian software start-up.

There are hundreds of variations on this story, and the one that I have described is probably the dream at its most ambitious. But its central proposition – of an entrepreneurial individual investing in a technical or IT education to achieve social mobility through IT work – is both implicitly and explicitly

promoted to the middle classes around the country by the existence of thousands of small IT institutes, which are both catering for and fuelling these IT-employment aspirations. Hundreds of thousands of young people, and not only those in Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Chennai, have literally bought into the IT dream, through spending money on a range of IT and programming courses, in the hope that a short course in Java, C++, or even basic computer literacy will help them to get a job at a Microsoft or an Infosys. It is not uncommon for such courses to come with claims of 'employment/placement guaranteed'.

Such claims draw their strength partly from the wider public focus on the success of particular individuals: the national IT heroes (Van der Veer 2005) who have followed their entrepreneurial instincts to rise up the global IT hierarchy and, in so doing, help India to do the same. At the time of my fieldwork, the focus was on individuals such as Naryana Murthy, the 'humble middle-class' founder of Infosys, and Sabeer Bhatia, the young 'techie' from Bangalore who founded Hotmail and sold it to Microsoft for $400 million. In fawning journalistic accounts, such as Chidanand Rajghatta's *The Horse that Flew: How India's Silicon Gurus Spread their Wings* (2001), it is the middle-class roots of Murthy and others that are lauded overall.

I should stress, to avoid misinterpretation, that for the vast majority, the IT dream is exactly that: a dream, beyond reach. What I aim to show here, however, is the strength of the IT dream for those who do find themselves in a position (in embodying the right forms of cultural and social capital) to gain an IT or outsourcing job.

This is a strong variant of an enterprise culture in which the ultimate responsibility for social mobility and the risks associated with the global flexibilization of labour are assumed by the enterprising self. With Indian cities such as Bangalore undergoing profound transformations enabled by new flows of capital and labour (both positive and negative – see Benjamin 2000, Nair 2005), enterprise culture takes on particular strength. Not only does the visible and much-lauded success of the new IT entrepreneurial class seem to justify a focus on individual aspiration over wider structural issues of development, but the city itself is reconfigured as an 'entrepreneurial city', in Harvey's analysis (1987: 264), where entrepreneurial action becomes the 'main motif' as the city competes against its regional and international rivals in the international division of labour and as a centre of consumption.

In an earlier volume examining the rise of enterprise culture in 1980s Britain and elsewhere, Russell Keat distinguishes between two potential but related definitions. The first focuses on the way in which, as part of neoliberal reforms which might include the downsizing of the state and the privatization of former state industries and assets, the 'commercial enterprise' begins to take on a 'paradigmatic status' as the preferred *modus operandi* of 'any form of institutional organization'. The second definition focuses on 'a rather loosely related set of characteristics such as initiative, energy, independence, boldness, self-reliance, a willingness to take risks and to accept responsibility for one's own actions and

so on' (Keat 1991: 3). While I focus primarily on the second definition here, it is worth noting that it is the first – the entrepreneurial firm as emblematic of a wider set of neoliberal reforms – which forms the backdrop to a Bangalore labour sector still adjusting to the restructuring of the state's hi-tech enterprises and the rise of new private-sector industries, including IT. My informants had to imbibe these entrepreneurial qualities not only because they accepted the discourse in its own terms, but because they required a certain amount of initiative, *nous*, and self-reliance to understand how the new practices and hierarchies of labour in these private enterprises actually operated.

At the end of his introductory chapter on enterprise culture, Keat appears to suggest a counter-hegemonic project to resist the dominant interpretations of enterprise culture as intimately linked to a Thatcherist neoliberal agenda (Keat 1991: 4, 14). He promotes the fact that there can indeed be diverging interpretations of enterprise culture, and that the relative stress on the enterprise as institutional (free-market) reform (as opposed to the qualities of the enterprising individual) is itself part of a political project that can be resisted. This suggests that the current rhetoric and narratives around *Jugaad* (a word not prevalent in the south at the time at my fieldwork, but roughly translated as 'creative innovation') should not be readily dismissed as part of a wider neoliberal discourse (see Mankekar, in this volume). Instead it suggests that there is a need for better understanding of both narratives and practice of *Jugaad in situ* – a key contribution of this volume.

In the next section I turn to three of my informants, who narrate the IT dream in different ways. All English-medium educated, all middle class, they come from sufficiently different circumstances to give some indication of the permeation of the dream through multiple settings within the Indian middle classes. My informants' trajectories reveal both the partial realization of the dream and some of its inherent tensions, as individuals attempt to resolve their real – and often less lucrative – experiences against this wider national narrative of IT-led progress.

Individual narratives of the IT dream

David

David was the son of the owner of the cybercafé in which I carried out my research – and a good friend of Karan, whose search for employment was cited at the beginning of this chapter. David's Tamil Christian family was one of the many Tamil families who migrated to work for the British from the north-west districts of Tamil Nadu in Bangalore's old army cantonment days. His father was employed in a state electrical firm, but was made redundant in 1999 and used his redundancy money to follow his brothers in starting a cybercafé business. David had left education after gaining his pre-university certificate, working first for his mother's brothers' cybercafé in the south of Bangalore and then for his father's cybercafé in the north of the city. During this time he had

learned a fair amount about computers and was comfortable installing operating systems, linking together multiple computers in a network, and taking care of the other day-to-day maintenance needs of a small cybercafé. Like many young men employed in this small-enterprise sector providing internet services to the local population, David can be seen to embody many of the traits of enterprise culture.

When I first met him in 2002, it seemed unlikely that either his entrepreneurial spirit or his repeated investment in obtaining IT hardware and networking certificates would actually result in a coveted job in the sector. Recruitment in the IT industry appeared to be slowing significantly, and David, the least qualified of a group of friends that included several engineering graduates, did not seem likely to find employment. Within a year of my leaving, however, he had managed to get a job paying around Rs.12,000 per month in a large outsourcing company, which was providing technical support to an American internet service provider.

While his call-centre position might seem far from the heights of the software industry, David's case is still illustrative of why the entrepreneurial IT dream may be so persuasive for others: someone with modestly low educational capital (a secondary-school pass) is able to find a well-paid job and enjoy the benefits of his newly acquired spending power and the status of working within the outsourcing sector. Within months of getting the job, he had secured himself a loan of Rs.80,000 for a new Bajaj Pulsar motorbike, and a loan of Rs.200,000 for a Hyundai Santro car. He found himself being able to treat his friends to beer and cigarettes, buy the latest mobile phones, and dress like a *bona fide* member of Bangalore's IT-employed elite (see Nisbett 2007, 2009).

But in other respects, David's narrative also demonstrates the limits of the dream. When I saw him in December 2005, much of the initial ardour had worn off. He appeared to be permanently ill, battling against a cold, or a virus, or just exhausted from nearly two years of night shifts. He showed his friends a whole stack of sickness certificates signed by his doctor for his absences. It is hardly surprising that David's enthusiasm was waning. Most of his salary was going into paying off his multiple vehicle loans every month, rather than into any significant new acts of consumption. His father told me that his family had yet to see any of the money from David's salary. He commented shrewdly that in middle-class or lower-middle-class suburbs all over the city you will often see a car like David's parked outside a house, but inside the home 'the family will have nothing'.

Despite the night shifts and the lack of opportunities to move up the outsourcing hierarchy, David's desire to achieve the IT dream had not diminished. Instead of dismissing the dream outright, his solution was yet further recourse to the dream itself. Discussions with friends revolved around what kind of course or qualification he could do to help him find something 'in the technical line'. The last I overheard on this subject was his enquiry to a friend about a training centre in the south of the city, which was offering certification in networking and systems engineering via Cisco and Microsoft.

John

John, a Roman Catholic Tamil and the son of an army officer, was 22 at the time of my initial research in 2002. His family lived in a small but comfortable two-room apartment in an army compound in central Bangalore. John completed his pre-university certificate and had done one year of a Bachelor of Commerce degree, before dropping out to join the army football team. He was persuaded to follow an IT course by a female friend whose brother had obtained a well-paid job in a Gulf state following IT training. John enrolled in the same IT institute as myself, in one of Bangalore's north-eastern Tamil-speaking suburbs, to learn web design, Java, and SQL.

As the course progressed, John began to doubt the certainty of finding a job in software. He had heard that the job market was 'down' and that there was heavy competition for available places. He was confused by comments from friends and by reports in the press, that studying hardware, rather than software, was the sure way into employment. He did not understand what kind of IT course would actually lead to a job, given the myriad courses on offer in Bangalore. Hardware, software, networking; E-commerce, Java, WAP, C#, .NET, CAD, MCSE, CCNA, Oracle: these were all names and certifications bandied around by the knowledgeable, but there was no certainty about which would actually help one to secure employment. Aryan, another informant from a cybercafé in central Bangalore's old cloth-trading area, emphasized the difficulty of staying on top of all these new technologies:

> After every 6 months, something changes, a new thing comes.… Because you just can't depend on one simple thing, right, you have to keep on changing, change, change, change, change.… Pascal came, Basic came, MS DOS, now people say ok, if you know something of Windows it's good, if you go for Oracle, if you know C++.

Keeping on top of new technologies is not important, however, solely for its employment potential. This was clear when I asked John why he was taking this particular course:

> [Before completing the course] I didn't know much about the computers. I am still backward in computers. So, you know, after I get married, if I get a child, after 5 years the computers will be … each and every person will be having one in their home. So without knowing about computers how can I teach to my child? That this is computer? [laughs] So, if I want to learn computers, if I want to do anything … what my child asks something to me. 'Dad, what is this computers?' I can only say that this is a monitor and this is a keyboard. Now, [having studied IT] I'm very sure that I can make them learn what computers is. Even I am helping my two neighbour aunties and one of my neighbours, they are having a computer but they don't know anything about computers. So everyday, after 10 or 11 o'clock I'll go there and make them learn what computers is.

John describes the cultural capital inherent not just in 'learning computers' but in the embodied practice of demonstrating this knowledge to others. Whether or not this knowledge will help John to find a job, it is clear that he enjoys a certain status among his friends, family, and neighbours in being able to 'teach them computers'. He would not want his future wife or children to think him 'backward in computers'. Such feelings go far in telling us just how much IT knowledge and its use has become a status marker in middle-class masculinity in Bangalore. IT training is not just preparation for such employment; but in John's perception it is an education to become a husband, a father: a middle-class man (cf. Jeffrey *et al.* 2005; Parry 1999: 127; and Freeman 2000: 214 on the links between computers, gender, and modernity).

Patrick

Patrick, aged 28 when I met him in 2006, was the son of an engineer from Shimoga, in North Karnataka, who described his family as 'upper-middle-class'. When pressed, he defined this in the following terms: 'they can indulge in a few things that they want to have in their lives, you know as far as house, car, and you know getting a fancy education for their children in a good college is concerned'.

Like many of his generation, he had been persuaded into taking an engineering degree, despite interests in literature, history, and culture. After his degree, he was drawn by the promise of working for a call centre handling sales for a UK-based mail-order company. He then worked for a company specializing in the Canadian insurance market, and, in 2006, was working as a 'process specialist specializing in talent management', with a global IT company as a client.

A confident and articulate young man, Patrick is thus representative of many well-educated and ambitious young people of his generation who see themselves only temporarily drawn into the outsourcing sector but are happy to enjoy the lifestyle and the possibilities for consumption that this enables. Despite finding some of the call-centre work initially boring, Patrick told me 'at the end of the day, it used to give me a salary that could keep me going and also fulfil my social activities, like going to parties and also pay my rent and make a decent living'.

Patrick's narrative makes explicit the pattern of consumption and consumer debt that is fuelled by the inflated salaries of the outsourcing sector. He made an explicit link between 'the spending capacity of the younger generation … and credit cards and everything being made available very easily'. Spending 'only used to be parties and buying ourselves fancy clothes, mobiles, electronic goods, staying in a nice flat'; but now:

> the banks have become very very easy, because we have a job and they know that we can pay and the loans are easy, so you invest in a set of wheels, a two wheeler or four wheeler, depending on how good your salary is.

But as with the other outsourcing workers to whom I spoke, such as David, happiness with present circumstances is tempered by a realization that this very contentment can obscure the lack of opportunity within the sector and the potential opportunities which may lie elsewhere:

> [A BPO employee] might have the potential to move on and get more, but he won't really do it, because he's happy with what he has.… Two out of ten people get to grow, and the other eight they either stagnate or they move into other companies in same positions or a little higher positions, and yeah with a lot of time and effort move up a notch in their careers. So what I would suggest is use BPO as a foundation, till you get your heels, you know, until you get a grip. And then using this grip leap on to something higher.

Cultural capital and the misrecognition of the IT dream

The experiences and narratives of the individuals considered so far are not intended as representative of either the dream's fulfilment or its failure. They were chosen because they both illustrate and yet interrogate the central tenets of the IT dream, linked to an entrepreneurial spirit and the national discourse of IT-led progress. There are no extraordinary rags-to-riches stories here. All three young men come from firmly middle-class backgrounds, yet at the same time they demonstrate some of the range of positions that a middle-class identity entails: from the small-business family of David, to the small-salary but secure and pensionable army position of John's father, to the self-ascribed 'upper-middle-class' background of Patrick.

Their experiences also reveal the ways in which different aspects of the dream are deferred and reshaped to fit individual narratives and trajectories. John, who quickly realizes the competition for software jobs in Bangalore, reshapes his IT knowledge as a source of cultural and symbolic capital centred on his masculinity. David initially realizes his dream to work in a call centre, with its associated material benefits, but then goes on first to question and then to re-mould the dream around new IT-based aspirations. Patrick is drawn into the call-centre life from his 'upper-middle-class background' and, like David, is clearly enjoying the opportunities for consumption and socializing that this enables. This does not stop him, however, from interrogating the lack of opportunities for people like him to move on within the sector, yet an outsourcing job remains a staging post on the way to something better.

David and Patrick are certainly not alone in seeing call centres and broader outsourced work as a route into higher-status software development. The work entails an association with computers and communications technologies and is therefore seen as a potential stepping-stone towards more 'hi-tech jobs' (cf. Freeman 2000: 149; Taylor and Bain 2005). Software services/production and Business Process Outsourcing (or 'IT-Enabled Services') are often treated separately in the literature, and recent work has focused on the systems of disciplinary control and

surveillance imposed on the bodies and minds of young outsourcing workers. But while clearly differentiating between the sectors in terms of the relative status and incomes attached to them, many of my informants would look first to software development and then to the broader outsourced service sector to find a job: these two 'IT-enabled' sectors remain strongly linked in their narrated aspirations. And while there *are* key differences in status, salaries, skills, and knowledge between the software development and broader outsourcing sectors, there are also many similarities between these two sides of India's IT-enabled economy. Both sectors rely on networks of global telecommunications, computers, cheap labour, and the image of India as a potential 'knowledge society'. Both have arrived as a result of global, post-Fordist trends in cost cutting and outsourcing, whether for software development, data processing, or handling customer calls. While the wider Business Process Outsourcing industry was just beginning to lower its recruitment expectations for a workforce prone to attrition during my fieldwork in 2002, it began, just like the software industry, by promoting the fact that at the end of every phone line was a highly-skilled graduate ready to answer customer queries. Conversely, studies of the software industry have highlighted the de-skilling of software engineers embarked as cyber-coolies on vast projects of 'code-crunching' (Monica Prasad 1998: 441; Lakha 1994: 402).

Collectively, my informants' narrated trajectories also illustrate the ways in which a classic middle-class struggle for social reproduction and mobility, through investment in new forms of educational and cultural capital of their children (Béteille 2001; Bourdieu 1984; Osella and Osella 2000; Liechty 2003), results in the inflation of qualifications required for entry and progression within the sector (for more on qualification inflation, see for example Parry 1999: 127; Holmström 1976: 39; Dore 1976; Jeffrey *et al.* 2005; Bourdieu 1984: 132–3).

Raj, a software engineer whom I interviewed in a multinational company, pointed this out when discussing entry requirements for software 'freshers':

> Yeah, qualifications is a major criteria now because before, say two three years back, a guy or girl with a BSC degree can also enter into computers. But now, they should be at least a MCA or an Engineer BE, you should have a BE or a BTech degree. Or an MCA degree. If you are a BSC you have to do your MTech, MCA, to get a job right now.

Raj's ability to reel off the accepted hierarchy of qualifications contrasts with John's confusion and anxiety about what one actually needs to study in order to gain a sure foothold in the IT hierarchy. It reflects Bourdieu's assertion that one of the hardest things for the non-elite classes to discover is actually what sorts of qualification are required in order to achieve the greatest return on educational investment (1984: 142). But the sense of qualification inflation has an impact on those already within the sector, who cannot sit back safely in a world of fast-changing skills and qualifications.

In the narratives considered earlier, David's perception of the continual need to upgrade qualifications in the hope that it can get him into 'something

technical' is not therefore unusual. It underlines the pressure felt by those working within IT companies to continually upgrade their skills and keep ahead of a fast-changing world of programming languages and new technologies. Raj, the software programmer quoted above, himself a software 'fresher', narrated how this pressure was not due solely to the number of engineers chasing the same jobs, but was also due to the wider booms and busts in the global economy reflected in the software market – which effectively transferred the risk to the individual software entrepreneur:

> If there is a lull in the software market, you will see what the persons are most active and keep them and the others will be fired. So, as long as the market is good, everything is fine, no-one is going to tell you anything. But take your own initiative to learn the new technologies, but to get into some other projects, learn how the business process is done. Because this software market may or may not last long.

Nearly all those chasing jobs in the software industry had seen the recruitment expansion of the late 1990s give way to a drop in software recruitment in 2001–2002. But my informants in the cybercafé felt this frustration in particular, as they had all bought into the IT dream in some way, by investing money in IT courses at private institutes around the city. Most were finding their initial aim of obtaining a job in a software company unrealized. Karan summed up this frustration, this betrayal of the dream, when he asked me 'How much money can we keep on spending on software to get a job?', the question quoted at the beginning of this chapter. When pressed, he gave the following explanation for why he and his friends were finding these industries difficult to break into:

> …a relative of mine is working in Infosys, ok? And he's ready to do anything for me. He can get me a job without … any interview at all. I can directly be posted in that particular position. But if … I don't have any relative in that particular company … Infosys, so I won't be getting any sort of job, though however well I do in that exam, however I struggle hard, I won't be given a chance to work there. That is what is prevailing in India, they give respect to money, if you have lots of money they give you a job, if you have good influence they give you a job, other than that it's very difficult to get a job in IT industry.

And David, before he had managed to find his technical-support role, espoused a very similar view to that of his friend:

> Unless you know … a particular person in that company, you cannot get into that company and speak to people. Because all MNC companies are coming up and they take up all … how do you say, posh peoples, ok, well qualified people, whereas in middle class, they don't give … that much of importance.

When one disentangles these narratives of corruption and social bias in the Indian IT industry, it is possible to identify five interrelated claims on the role of social and cultural capital, which might seem to challenge the inherent image of entrepreneurial meritocracy. The first is the importance of nepotism or connections in finding a job. The second is that one can literally buy one's way into a job. The third is that one has to be 'posh', i.e. have money or good influence (which can be seen as related to the first two, but also can be seen as a reference to social background). The fourth is that being 'posh', i.e. from a higher social background, equates to being well qualified, and vice versa. The fifth is that if you are not from the right socio-economic background, it is irrelevant how hard you work or what qualifications you obtain, because of claims one to four.

In many senses these are standard narratives of nepotism, connections, and corruption and the perceived power of social capital. They reflect widespread beliefs that any decent job, in any industry, requires the right contacts and the payment of large sums of money up-front (see, for example, Hölmstrom 1976; Parry 1999; and cf. Gooptu 2007 on the wider crisis of corruption perceived by industrial workers reacting to the progressive casualization of labour).

But in citing the need to be 'posh' and the importance of 'family background', it is quite possible that my informants' real intention was to make an implicit reference to caste. Among this group of friends there was no evidence that those from the higher-caste Mudaliar backgrounds were faring any better than either their Christian or Scheduled Caste peers. In this mixed group, any explicit reference to caste or community difference was avoided, whether discussing differences among the friendship group or in society at large. This is reflected within the ethos of IT companies themselves: references to caste in conversations with IT-company recruiters and managers were met mostly with well-rehearsed lines on the role of merit and the fact that caste discrimination exists 'only in the village' and does not form part of the new Indian society. Occasionally, any reference to caste was met with an outright display of irritation.

The group of friends who formed my cybercafé informants all shared, however, the commonly held view that the upper tiers of the IT industry are dominated by a Brahmin elite.[2] They once joked that the reason why Brahmins do so well in their examinations (and thus gain IT jobs) is because they nail their traditional ponytail to the wall to keep them from falling asleep when studying through the night. With explicit references to caste all but banned, unless through such forms of humour, the existence of 'posh people' at the top of the IT hierarchy preventing the mobility of people from their 'family background' could well be read as a description of caste discrimination, just as much as a reference to a wealthier middle-class or elite background. The divide between the two is, of course, blurred and elastic.

So, while avoiding the mistake of interpreting these intuitively held narratives of corruption as absolute truth, we should be similarly wary of swallowing whole any rhetoric of IT-based meritocracy before examining the recruitment practices of the sector in more detail. Having contacts in a company, whether relatives or

friends, is certainly important. Recruitment practices based on 'referrals', 'recommendation', or 'employee get employee' are widespread and accepted as standard throughout both the software and outsourcing industries. A human-resources manager whom I interviewed from a medium-sized BPO start-up in the suburb of Koramangala told me that they had stopped advertising in the local papers because this way they would 'get a lot of junk'. Carla Freeman's study of data workers in Barbados reveals a similar trend: the companies that she studied advertised initially through local newspapers and received 'a flood of job applications' while 'many of the current data entry operators applied for their jobs on the advice of personal contacts in the industry' (2000: 145).[3]

So while Karan might be exaggerating the role of contacts, it is not a complete falsification to stress their importance. Although having a relative or friend working in a software/ITES (information technology enabled services) company might not automatically get you a job, as he suggests, there is a good chance that a contact will secure that all-important interview, often for a job that has not been advertised, thus increasing one's chances tremendously. The fact that five of the young men from my cybercafé research ended up working in the same company gives credence to the suggestion that employment opportunities in these new sectors circulate among friendship groups.[4] The use of social capital is clearly then a prevalent (and recognized) strategy in finding a job – but then, given its use in other employment markets around the world, this confirmation should probably not come as a great surprise. (See, for example, Breman 1999: 22 or Upadhya and Vasavi 2006: 33).

It is the unpacking of cultural capital within Karan's and David's statements and the links that they and others draw between recruitment and family background (in claims three to five in the analysis above) that are perhaps the most interesting aspects of the narratives examined here. With echoes of the Mandal debates,[5] one's 'family background', as displayed in outwardly apparent displays of cultural capital (which might otherwise be judged as merit), is quite clearly recognized in the narratives as a way into a job. This has both positive and negative manifestations: from David's assertion that 'they don't give much importance to the middle class' (here implying a humbler, more down-to-earth image of the middle class) to Patrick's stress on the benefits of his convent-school upbringing as an 'upper-middle-class' man. When I asked him what had helped him to get his BPO job, for example, Patrick told me:

> Our upbringing out here also matters a lot, the kind of schooling that we've done. I basically studied in a convent and mostly the spoken language was English and since most of my friends couldn't speak the local lingo, we used to converse in English and English came very naturally to me and er, yeah, this is probably the main, the main thing that got me entry into a BPO.

Patrick's linking of ability in English and one's background is also indicative of the increasing importance of English in contemporary India as a boundary marker between a growing urban consuming elite and the rest (Varma 1998: 27;

Lakha 1999: 265; Upadhya 1997: 176; Saavala 2010: 33–7). An individual's ability in English forms an important part of the package of skills and competencies that are assessed by software and outsourcing recruiters. Following Bourdieu, one's ability in English becomes a marker for a whole package of competencies that are difficult to acquire by pedagogic strategy alone (cf. Fuller and Narasimhan 2006: 260).

This explains the growth in a new industry alongside the IT institutes, providing the levels of cultural capital that are not acquired through the Indian schooling system. In Bangalore, a chain of highly visible yellow-signed 'English Language' centres has sprung up in the years since my initial fieldwork, while national IT institutes, once offering courses in Java, now offer training in 'personal effectiveness'. While this becomes an important component of cultural-capital construction for the urban middle classes, what impact it will have on their trajectories though the employment market remains to be seen: it is doubtful that a short (and possibly quite poorly taught) course in English or communication skills can do little other than add a new certificate to a candidate's already burgeoning portfolio of qualifications.

Conclusion

This chapter has gone some way in considering the role played by the intertwined discourses of an Indian 'knowledge society' and the ethic of enterprise culture in shaping the narratives and trajectories of young middle-class IT aspirants. Their lives represent an important metropolitan facet of a wider culture of entrepreneurial aspiration underlying the experience of young people in post-liberalization India. In attempting to follow what I have called the IT dream, aspirants adopt an entrepreneurial strategy and embrace the entrepreneurial ethic of 'initiative, energy, independence, boldness, self-reliance, *a willingness to take risks*' (Keat 1991: 3, my emphasis). Middle-class families diligently, and often riskily, invest in the future of the younger generation; but the sheer range of paper qualifications and 'certifications' on offer is confusing for those ignorant of the current needs of the industry. Uncertainty over the future of the market puts only greater pressure on individuals to upgrade their skills. Despite the resultant qualification inflation, many are left behind. They find solace in standard narratives of corruption and bias in recruitment towards the higher social classes. Emulating the cultural competencies of the enterprising IT elites is thus recognized as an alternative strategy where attempts to gain educational capital alone have failed. Yet ironically, further (risky) conversion of material resources to yet more 'certification' is presented as the means by which this is achieved (see also McGuire, this volume): a recognition or perhaps misrecognition of the importance of cultural capital inherent in pedagogical strategies for mobility (Bourdieu 1984: 6).

It is the risk-taking dimension of the entrepreneurial ethic that requires more careful analysis in examining trajectories through this field. As I argued in the introduction, this cannot be uncoupled from the wider set of reforms whereby

Bangalore and its enterprises have been newly recast as an 'entrepreneurial city' (Harvey 1987: 264). In their continual struggle to cultivate and imbibe the social and cultural qualities of the IT entrepreneur, these young people assume the full gamut of risks of a liberalized and flexibilized market in which the risks, opportunities, and sustainability of new forms of labour have yet to be fully understood. The real discursive strength of an IT enterprise culture (prevalent at the time of my research and, I suspect, still current) is not then in the realization of the IT dream or even its partial realization, but in its narrative tenacity and malleability: in its ability to form and reform around the desires of these enterprising individuals, their friends and family, as they struggle to find and hold on to an IT job.

Acknowledgements

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Notes

1 The extent to which the middle classes define themselves around consumption is a matter of debate (see, e.g. Van Wessel 2004; Nisbett 2007, 2009; Saavala 2010), but is not a subject of this chapter.

2 As Fuller and Narasimhan write, there are 'no accurate figures … [but] in the public image of Chennai's IT industry, the large Brahmin presence is a prominent feature for insiders and outsiders alike' (2007: 126); and the same can be said of Bangalore's software sector.

3 See also Ramesh (2004: 494) and Upadhya and Vasavi (2006: 29).

4 See Holmstrom (1976: 44); De Neve (2003: 267); and Chopra (2004: 57) for further examples of friendship similarly acting as social capital in these older sectors.

5 This was a question picked up within the debate on reservations and the Mandal recommendations in the early 1990s, where the idea of merit as a deciding factor in recruitment was directly challenged. The way that 'merit' is simply shorthand for one's accumulated social and cultural capital, directly derived from family background, was emphasized: 'A cultural atmosphere at home that is conducive to book learning is reserved for the Brahmins and the Brahminised upper castes' (Balagopal 1990: 2233), and 'co-operative loans, industrial licences, supply contracts, managerial jobs' (ibid.: 2232) and so on are acquired through the social capital that is intrinsic to one's caste position.

11 The fractured spaces of entrepreneurialism in post-liberalization India

Jonathan Shapiro Anjaria and Ulka Anjaria

Enterprising subjects

On a cool December morning in Mumbai, hundreds of young people gather at a Mumbai university campus for the start of Jagriti Yatra, a three-week train journey intended 'to inspire young Indians … to lead development by taking to enterprise'.[1] Next to a sea of bags packed for the journey, trees are adorned with posters announcing the trip: 'Jagriti Yatra – Building India through Enterprise', they say. In the opening session, participants enthusiastically sing lyrics such as '*Yaaro chalo badalne ki ruth hai*' ['Let's go friends, it's the season of change'], which capture the expectant mood of the crowd, and '*Kuchh likha hai, kuchh likh denge*' ['Some things are left to fate, while some fates we will decide'], which underlines the sense of re-invented selves and the upending of tradition. The journey on which they are about to embark promises to be fun, but also transformative: this is personal improvement linked to national development, buoyed by an exuberant expression of the new, the empowered, and the imaginative. New logics of personal destiny and agency become a new ethic of personal and national development.

Meanwhile, on the streets outside the campus, vendors hawk bootlegged copies of the latest novels by Chetan Bhagat, young Indians' most popular English-language writer. While critics deride his lack of literary nuance, his immense popularity suggests that his treatment of themes as wide-ranging as the pressures of college-entrance tests, call-centre work, and inter-community romantic relationships, resonate with many. As with Jagriti Yatra, Bhagat's writings speak to a young generation through a language of initiative, enterprise, and self-actualization. His works attempt to propel the formation of the 'entrepreneurial spirit' that Jagriti attempts to 'awaken'.[2] In *What Young India Wants*, a collection of his non-fiction writings, Bhagat sketches out the changes needed to reward the inherent entrepreneurialism, the inner 'sparks' (Bhagat 2012: 102) present in so much of the country's youth. As Bhagat repeatedly argues, enterprise is meaningful only in a context that 'reward[s] it' (ibid.: 144). Instead of celebrating youthful entrepreneurs such as Mark Zuckerberg, whose main motivation, writes Bhagat, 'was to do something innovative, entrepreneurial and most importantly, cool' (ibid.: 16), India's media elite continues to reward a

handful of business families comfortably shielded from the vagaries of the market by corruption and political connections.

Bhagat's call for a new political culture echoes Anna Hazare's anti-corruption campaign, which gained international attention in the spring of 2012. Like Bhagat, Hazare and his followers saw political transformation in terms of personal betterment. Speeches and rallies were accompanied by visits from the hugely popular self-help 'yoga guru' Baba Ramdev.[3] Corruption and political patronage were denounced as bad for national development, as well as for the soul. Hazare's campaign captured the imagination of many, especially in the urban middle class, who yearn for a transformation of the political system; its targets were not just bribe-taking politicians but the broad discourse of politics based on community identification, social welfare, and the redressing of grievances on which the 'old' India was seen to rest (Sitapati 2011: 41).

This new politics has also spawned a trend of popular Hindi films in which citizens take action to resolve social injustice in the wake of an ineffective government. Although their origin can be traced to the vigilante films of the 1970s, the new iteration of this plotline transforms the 'angry young man', branded by his marginality from birth, into the outraged citizen who despite his normally reserved middle-class exterior is pushed to the limit by the ineptitude of the police, the legal system, or government bureaucracy. In *Viruddh*, a gentle elderly man, frustrated by the inability of the state to prosecute his son's murderer, is driven to acquire a gun and shoot down the guilty man himself.[4] At the end of the more recent thriller *Kahaani*, the protagonist Vidya – pregnant throughout the film, and thus a symbol of motherly innocence – is found to be manipulating the Kolkata police force with a false story in order to effect the execution of a rogue policeman who had been responsible for her husband's death. In both these cases, the elderly man and the pregnant woman, both seemingly weak, are fitting representatives of this new middle class, whose anger is a direct product of government ineptitude.

We see a similar displacement of working-class injustices by middle-class ones in the transition from *Munnabhai M.B.B.S.* to its sequel, *Lage Raho Munna Bhai*. From one film to the next, the protagonist is transformed from a street-savvy *tapori*, operating under an old political regime of the underworld, to an entrepreneur fighting on behalf of the middle-class 'citizen'. This trajectory of Munnabhai's character over these two films suggests a personal arc that mirrors national development from an India composed of 'common men' to one composed of enterprising citizens. This transformation is evident both in Munnabhai's outward characteristics – for instance, his language and his clothes – and also in the causes that he espouses, which begin with protests against corrupt builders, but then morph into exclusively middle-class complaints such as hawkers setting up stores on the streets and the difficulty of getting a railway reservation, and finally to more abstract interpersonal issues such as how to deal with an inconsiderate neighbour, or how to discern the true character of someone you have just met. The films thus narrate the process whereby political battles become issues of self-care.

Artefacts of enterprise circulate widely in contemporary India. They are found everywhere: in self-help guides, where enterprise epitomizes personal empowerment; in popular fiction, where it produces new plots and character motivations; in film, where it enables new kinds of protagonist; in mainstream politics, where it informs new platforms for mobilization; and in social activism, where it constitutes the legitimizing basis of people's political claims. This 'enterprise culture' (Burchell 1996: 29) fuses old narratives of national development with a new celebration of the self. Whereas Gandhi famously argued that purification of the soul would lead, in an allegorical sense, to national freedom, the enterprise ethic upholds betterment of the self as the literal actualization of national development. Thus whereas Gandhi's personal ethical enactments such as *brahmacharya* and wearing rough *khadi* (Tarlo 1996) represented freedom through denial of the self,[5] to advocates of enterprise culture, freedom comes from the embrace of the self.[6]

The 'generalization of an "enterprise form" to *all* forms of conduct – to the conduct of organizations hitherto seen as being non-economic, to the conduct of government and to the conduct of individuals themselves' (Burchell 1996: 28–9) is a defining feature of neoliberal governmentality: a form of rule 'not through "society," but through the regulated choices of individual citizens, now construed as subjects of choices and aspirations to self-actualization and self-fulfillment' (Rose 1996: 41). This form of governmentality arose out of the demise of the welfare state and the consequent privatization of models of national betterment as, now, the responsibility of every citizen. It might seem, therefore, that the ubiquity of entrepreneurship in India is another symptom of this larger, global trend.[7]

This chapter, however, seeks to complicate the claim of the all-pervasiveness of enterprise culture in contemporary India. We argue that although entrepreneurship seems to be everywhere in the new Indian city, its ubiquity should not imply its uniformity. As we show, the *idea* of entrepreneurship might be everywhere, but what that idea means, its relationship to actual practices, and its incorporation into new structures of meaning-making in fact vary widely. This is true both of new middle-class political activism and of new fictional works, both of which are a product of, and thus seem to valorize, enterprise culture. A close interrogation of both the lived experience of enterprise and its cultural meanings as represented in literature shows that this charismatic idea generates multiple subjectivities, rather than a unitary one – 'forestall[ing]', in Lisa Rofel's words, 'a sense that neoliberalism is a universal set of principles from which derives, in a deterministic fashion, a singular type of neoliberal subject' (Rofel 2007: 2). Enterprise culture provides meaning in different ways, producing heterogeneous and incoherent political effects. Thus more than the consistency of the language of entrepreneurship, we are witnessing a widespread interrogation of the relevance of the concept in different spaces of Indian society. What emerges from this is the profound *partiality* of the idea of entrepreneurship; despite its tie to a global neoliberalism, its multiple lives fail to remake the subject in its entirety.

Entrepreneurial citizenship

In 2007, civic activist Adolf D'Souza was elected as a corporator to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation, or BMC. His victory was the first of its kind. Given his lack of political pedigree or party affiliation, D'Souza's win seemed to rest solely on his personal initiative and his experience with neighbourhood- and church-based activism and social work. The press, lauding him as 'Mumbai's first citizens' corporator',[8] interpreted his success as a gauge of new political culture in India at large – one that would be independent-minded and forward-thinking, motivated by a desire for good governance and the elimination of corruption, rather than personal political ambition or financial reward. Indeed, in the following years, dozens of 'citizen candidates'[9] followed suit, running for local office outside the traditional political-party structure. While none matched D'Souza's success,[10] together they heralded a new political movement, largely confined to the middle classes, which promised a radical transformation of India's system of governance through individual initiative and an ethic of enterprise.

The manifestation of enterprise culture in politics began in the mid 1990s, when middle-class social activism acquired new prominence in India's big cities (Baviskar and Ray 2011: 2). Urban beautification campaigns, as well as efforts to stop encroachment and noise pollution, have existed for more than a century; however, only by the 1990s did these efforts coalesce into a political movement (Anjaria 2009; Ghertner 2011; Zérah 2007). In Mumbai, for instance, a city-wide, middle-class civic movement gained prominence in the 1990s by grafting good-governance rhetoric legitimized by international lending institutions on to older complaints about encroachments, uncollected garbage, and dilapidated infrastructure. Following the successful renovation of a prominent park in south Mumbai, an effort spearheaded by a residents' association, a city-wide effort emerged to address quality-of-life issues by transforming the city's governance and political culture. NGOs such as AGNI (Action for Good Governance and Networking in India) and Citispace (formerly Citizens' Forum for the Protection of Public Spaces) united with neighbourhood welfare associations in a broad campaign against encroachment, slums, garbage, and the condition of open spaces (Baud and Nainan 2008; Harriss 2007). Civic activists argued that poor governance and a political culture mired in patronage, corruption, and 'vote bank' politics were the root of these problems.

Adolf D'Souza's 2007 municipal election victory promised a more efficiently run city, a strategy of both mundane reality and lofty vision, motivated as much by the desire to legitimate a new kind of political subject as by the desire to create a new kind of city. In a straightforward sense, D'Souza's novelty lay in his disconnect from traditional party politics. He emerged from, and was supported by, the middle-class civic-activism campaign. Candidates who followed him in subsequent municipal elections called themselves 'consensus' or 'citizen' candidates. According to the *Juhu Citizen* newsletter, whereas traditional candidates are 'selected by party high commands' who are motivated by 'glamour' and

'power', the citizen candidate, having 'emerge[d] from a consensus between various like minded organisations in the constituency',[11] is positioned to address local concerns effectively.

D'Souza's novelty also lay in the new kind of political subjectivity that he represented: that of enterprising citizens, those who embody 'self-governance' (Zérah 2007: 67) in its literal and figurative senses. Rather than petition the state for services, they envision their role as a watchdog, 'ensur[ing] that the laws and policies are adhered to by the authorities'.[12] This is a political engagement framed in terms of initiative and self-actualization. 'As a voter I felt I could make a change, but not as much as when I am a corporator', a young citizen's candidate is quoted as saying.[13] Rather than petition government officials for services such as cleaning up a street or a drain, citizens' groups strive to tackle the problems by themselves. In this way, they suggest, the only way to force the accountability of the state is to bypass it altogether; to show how, in the absence of bureaucratic inefficiency, India's problems can be easily fixed, even by the average citizen. Refusing to make claims based on social welfare or community identification, and bypassing party politics and its system of patronage, enterprising citizens relate to the state as agents of change external to the political process.

The limits of enterprise

Civic activists seem to epitomize the entrepreneurial ideal of neoliberalism. This is a political subjectivity working in concordance with a form of governance that has bypassed the social in favour of the individual, which rules 'through the regulated choices and aspirations to self-actualization and self-fulfillment' (Rose 1996: 41). Indeed, as John Harriss writes, civic activists in India who espouse a politics of good governance rather than a politics of livelihood are the 'subjects who are able to "participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" [and] are also the entrepreneurial consumer-citizens who function effectively in a free-market society' (Harriss 2007: 2717).

Yet there are some contradictions in this discourse as well. For instance, in their long effort to control the spread of street vending in Mumbai, civic activists implicitly distinguish between different forms of enterprise, some befitting a 'world-class' city, and some not. To civic activists, street vendors' encroachments threaten democracy, because despite the enterprise of individual hawkers, encroachments are an effect of the close relationships between corrupt BMC officials and corrupt street-vendor union leaders. The solution to encroachments thus lies in severing street vendors from this political nexus. During his fieldwork in 2005, civic activists explained to Jonathan Anjaria that they 'want to be in between the hawkers, the police, the BMC and the union leaders'. As activists explained in one community meeting, hawkers' entrepreneurial business practices need to be separated from their entrepreneurial spatial claims; the problem with hawkers is that they not only sell things on the side of the road, but they

simultaneously establish ownership over the spaces that they occupy. One activist suggested that hawkers should abandon the practice of using the street altogether. Instead, they should survey apartment buildings to learn more about each neighbourhood's market demand and then set up individualized delivery services. This view echoes that of Citispace, which states on its website:

> The dictionary meaning of 'hawk' is 'carry (goods) about for sale' and a 'hawker' is a 'person who hawks goods.' This was the traditional method used by hawkers in the Mumbai of 50's and 60's. CitiSpace [*sic*] believes this is what entrepreneurial, low income business in the informal sector should be.[14]

To the activists, the enterprise culture at the historical root of street vending has been compromised by the involvement of corrupt union leaders, politicians, and BMC officials, who encourage un-civic practices. Hawkers now squat on the road because of poor governance and greed, the argument goes; they appear to be struggling, but this appearance is belied by the reality of hawker lords, hawkers with private cars, and even the 'millionaire paanwala'.[15] These are largely middle-class myths. The myths serve to delegitimize not only hawkers' political claims, but also the ideal of entrepreneurship that they in reality uphold.

Indeed, hawkers have a complex relationship with entrepreneurialism – a fact that is indicative of the ambivalences of the concept itself. On the street, hawkers are self-employed risk-takers, entrepreneurs in a true sense. And yet to civic activists and much of the media, hawkers represent vestiges of the 'old' (pre-liberalization) economy and the corrupt populism that liberalization was supposed to supplant. Clearly, then, at the heart of the middle-class valorization of enterprise culture is a normative political subjectivity that must be attached to it, so that while enterprise in the form of small-scale business is validated, enterprise accompanied by a politics of group demands or social justice is not.

This reveals the fractured nature of 'enterprise culture' in the city: the 'entrepreneurial citizen' cannot recognize the entrepreneurialism of the hawkers, because they make illiberal political demands (Chatterjee 2004), if not direct appeals to social welfare. More than a politics of exclusion, this suggests a crucial gap in the discourse of 'enterprise culture' itself, whereby the valorization of enterprise reaches its limit when it is practised by those outside the abstract conception of the public good. Ironically, hawkers' entrepreneurialism delegitimizes their political demands: embodying as they do a politics of patronage, populism, and group-based demands, they are not proper to a 'world-class city'. Hawkers' entrepreneurial practices are seen as the outcome of a logic of group demands rather than individual self-fulfilment; likewise, their presence on the street is facilitated by bribe-taking state functionaries – also enterprising, it might be said, but again, not with the values that civic activists associate with it. In this way, the enterprising civic activists marginalize subaltern enterprise-based politics, even as they celebrate an entrepreneurial political subjectivity. Rather than produce a singular sense of self, the entrepreneurial subject is

refracted through the particularities of the city's spatial politics. 'Enterprise culture' thus constitutes a language of practice with a range of possible – and even contradictory – meanings.

A second ambivalence lies at the heart of this discourse, relating to civic activists' critique of urban development. On one hand, the vast upsurge in middle-class civic activism in urban India is an effect of liberalization (Fernandes 2006); citizens' groups draw from the same demographic that benefited from the 1991 reforms, and they represent the same middle-class urban professionals who, for instance, participate in the new spectacles of consumption that have swept urban India in the past decade. Furthermore, civic campaigns for clean and orderly streets represent a broader pattern of 'spatial cleansing' (Herzfeld 2006), in which the visible presence of the poor is removed in order to create an image of a more modern, 'world-class' Indian city (Dupont 2011). At the same time, however, civic activists are often critical of this very consumer-oriented urban landscape. Urban development based on consumption and real-estate, the twin tenets of the kind of 'entrepreneurial' urbanism (Harvey 1989) that characterizes the post-1970s neoliberal shift, does not always coincide with good governance. It is widely known that much of the development that has produced the glittering transnational aesthetic of liberalized Mumbai (such as the US-style shopping malls, luxury apartment buildings, and office complexes) are enabled by a flexibility in the law and use of land which, in turn, is made possible by illicit dealings with members of government and the underworld alike (Weinstein 2008).

The enterprising citizen is in conflict with the enterprising city in a number of ways. Civic activists, citing violations of land-use guidelines, attempt to block developers' construction in the city's booming north-west suburbs. 'We have been fighting at least three cases where developers have been trying to capture open spaces plots [sic],' says an activist.[16] Adolf D'Souza frequently complains about developers' appropriation of land meant for parks and other public services.[17] Civic activists understand the proliferation of shopping malls and luxury apartment buildings in spaces meant for public amenities as part of a larger problem of governance, of which even street vendors and slum residents are a part. Similarly, representatives of the Juhu Citizens' Welfare Group (JCWG) temporarily ally themselves with the city's indigenous fishing communities in an effort to stop a coastal highway. Implicitly criticizing the government's emphasis on showpiece-infrastructure projects, that central feature of the 'world-class' city, the President of JCWG argues that the funds should instead be used to support existing public transportation.[18] Civic groups blocked the development of a shopping mall adjacent to the historic Crawford Market.[19] Citispace, an organization which had spearheaded a campaign against street vendors in the 1990s, redirected its attention to issues such as the state's complicity in illegal construction on open land.[20] In 2008, they fought a proposed deal in which the BMC would sell off public parks in return for corporations covering the cost of their maintenance.

These are examples of enterprising citizenship that do not conform to the logic of the enterprising city. They instead reveal a level of ambivalence in the

discourse: civic activists frame their politics through the language of neoliberal governance, but direct their efforts at a spectrum of actors ranging from small-scale street vendors to wealthy developers. They dismiss the entrepreneurial aspirations of the working poor as irredeemably tinged by corruption, patronage, and 'vote-bank' politics; and yet they distance themselves from a middle-class consumer culture which, they suggest, reflects a similar lack of civic responsibility. At times, their campaigns encourage the elite takeover of the city, while at other moments they restrict it. They advocate technocratic measures, which circumvent Mumbai's boisterous political sphere, yet at other times they fight against the privatization of space. Their voice may be a product of liberalization, and yet the entrepreneurial citizen is not quite equivalent to the 'consumer-citizens' (Fernandes 2004: 2417) of neoliberal doctrine.

The reluctant entrepreneur

While enterprise culture has produced new political subjects, it has also produced new kinds of literary and filmic protagonists. Popular Hindi films such as *Lage Raho Munna Bhai* and *No One Killed Jessica*, novels such Chetan Bhagat's *One Night @ the Call Centre* and *Revolution 2020*, and Arvind Adiga's *The White Tiger* constitute a new trend of artistic production in India characterized by themes of ambition, personal initiative, an embrace of the new, and a rejection of an old, corrupt political system. The enterprising ethic informs character motivations, shapes decisions, and establishes moral authority. Unlike the protagonists of the pre-liberalization period, who were, in the words of Saleem Sinai, Rushdie's most famous protagonist, irredeemably 'handcuffed to history' (Rushdie 1980: 1), today's characters tend to be truly autonomous individuals. The enterprising protagonist is in control of his or her destiny and unfettered by social structures or sentimental ties to family and community. Entrepreneurial in the truest sense, protagonists of these works are 'individuals [who] made their own choices and were able to accomplish things through their own actions' (Gartner 2008: 352). They are thus severed from Rushdie's post-colonial melancholia; personal 'development' comes not from reconciling oneself to an allegorical life, but from the active accumulation of knowledge, the refusal to be a victim, and the rejection of fate. Growth comes from action in the world, rather than sitting passively by: from showing that individuals can 'determine our futures beyond the circumstances of the moment' (ibid.: 360). New protagonists embody this new ethos of *entreprendre* (the root of the word 'enterprise'), which means 'to take in hand, to take hold of' (ibid.).

Yet, as in the case of the civic activists described above, a closer look at literary and filmic protagonists who seem to conform to this ideal questions the idea of a fully-formed, neoliberal subject. In fictional literature especially, we see again and again the representation of an ironic gap between the entrepreneurial ideal and the actual enterprising subject. The new trend of protagonist-centred fiction is thus revealed to be a product of India's liberalization, but not a straightforward mirror of its associated free-market ideals. Indeed, just as there

is an ambivalent relationship between enterprise-inspired political subjectivity and the entrepreneurial city, there is an ambivalence in the connection between enterprising protagonists and the liberalized, 'new' India which made them possible.

The ironic perspective on entrepreneurship is most evident in Aravind Adiga's novel *The White Tiger*. The story is of Balram Halwai, a village boy who overcomes various hardships to make it big in the city. Balram is the metaphorical 'white tiger' of Laxmangarh, the village in which he is raised, because he is different from the people around him; he is 'the rarest of animals – the creature that comes along once in a generation' (Adiga 2008: 30). His cunning and intellect destine him to make something of his life. In Adiga's rural landscape, a space devoid of entrepreneurialism, Balram's distinction arises from a propensity to seize opportunities. During the course of the novel, Balram escapes his lowly occupational destiny to become a chauffeur to a local landlord, gains a coveted 'number-one driver' position which takes him to New Delhi, and finally manages to own a successful taxi company which services late-night call-centre workers in Bangalore. All this is enabled, however, through cunning, trickery, theft, and ultimately murder: he lies to his family, gains the position in New Delhi by betraying his friend, and finally earns the means to open the taxi service by stabbing Ashok, his employer, and stealing a briefcase full of money.

The White Tiger is thus pervaded with the language of enterprise; at the most obvious level, Balram's entire story is a product of India's liberalized urban landscape. His schemes against Ashok are conceived while waiting outside glittering US-style shopping malls; he uncovers Ashok's secrets while shuttling him home from nightclubs; and he achieves business success by transporting workers in Bangalore's transnational call-centre industry. Likewise, Balram's exceptionalism is framed in terms of an enterprising spirit; enterprise as a motivation, an ethic, and a goal dominates the narrative from the beginning. On the first page, Balram introduces himself as an entrepreneur. His imagined letter to Wen Jiabao, the Chinese Premier, reads: 'From the Desk of: "The White Tiger"/A Thinking Man/An Entrepreneur' (Adiga 2008: 1). He first forms his dreams of escape from the village through the story of Vijay, a pigherd-turned-bus conductor, who 'had made it in life … he was the first entrepreneur I knew of' (ibid.: 26). To rival American self-help books such as *Become an Entrepreneur in Seven Easy Days!*, he advocates instead his own story 'of how I got to Bangalore and became one of its most successful (though probably least known) businessmen': a story which will convey 'everything there is to know about how entrepreneurship is born, nurtured, and developed in this, the glorious twenty-first century of man' (ibid.: 4). Even at the very end, Balram continues to look to the future: 'You see, I'm always a man who sees "tomorrow" when others see "today"' (ibid.: 274).

But the novel is also a critical commentary on India's new enterprise culture. Balram realizes, on his arrival in Delhi, that the narrative of enterprise, which had motivated him to escape Laxmangarh, is not real, but a fantasy – a farce. Even after trying to take control of his own fate and change his surroundings, he

finds himself bound by the same oppressions as before, treated in some ways more cruelly in Delhi than he had been in the village. He can thus truly realize his father's dream and 'live like a man' (Adiga 2008: 26) only when he discovers that the normal paths to self-fulfilment are, and will forever, be closed to him. It is then that he resolves to murder his boss and steal the money. But this act, while freeing him, guarantees the death of his family members back home, who will undoubtedly be the target of the landowner's revenge. The costs of fully realizing the entrepreneurial subject thus become violently clear.

In this way, Adiga reminds his readers that entrepreneurship is a necessary pathway to self-realization, but a necessarily violent one; these attributes are presented as two sides of the same coin. By emptying out the ethics of enterprise, Adiga suggests that morality and entrepreneurship do not in fact coincide, which in turn challenges the rhetoric of 'India Shining' as a 'nation of entrepreneurs'. Thus each time Balram uses the word 'entrepreneur', it accrues *less* denotative meaning and more ironic meaning; the irony between his use of the term to describe his dystopic life's path and the value that the term is given in the national discourse becomes the source of social critique in this novel.

Adiga's is the most fully fleshed-out criticism of the entrepreneur, but the ironic presentation of enterprise culture appears in several other contemporary works as well. Danny Boyle's *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008) is a case in point. We have discussed elsewhere (Anjaria and Anjaria 2012) how what seems like a paradigmatic 'rags-to-riches' story (Giridharas 2009) is, in fact, a carefully conceived fantasy in which the knowledge that Jamal gains as an 'urban navigator' who survives in the streets and communities of the Indian city is coincidentally granted validity by a TV game show that sees such knowledge as 'trivia' and thus impossible for an educated person to ever simply guess. Here too, the ideal of taking one's destiny in one's own hand – central to the enterprise narrative – is made insignificant by the secondary and more important (and more engrossing) narrative of urban navigation and knowledge. There is a potential narrative of enterprise, but it cannot be seen in isolation from this primary story. As an 'entrepreneur', Jamal transforms himself from a fake tourist guide to a dishwasher, a peon in a tea shop, and finally the top winner of a game show. While ostensibly this path traces a conventional narrative from rurality/poverty/illiteracy to urbanity/wealth/English-speaking, focusing on this arc alone ignores how all the actual answers to the questions (that enable him to win the game show and thus collect the wealth) are those that he acquired under the former set of circumstances; indeed, one of the earlier and thus 'easiest' questions, to which he does not know the answer and for which he has to get the audience's assistance, asks what is written beneath the lions on the national emblem of India. According to the constable who is investigating whether Jamal cheated on the show, this is a question that 'my five-year-old daughter can answer'. Jamal's failure to answer this question correctly, even after becoming urbanized and fluent in English reveals, as with Balram, the failure of the entrepreneurship narrative to truly transport him out of his background. What works for him instead is a deliberate revaluing of his background *as knowledge* – something that allows

him to succeed at the end without the violence that Balram must perpetrate. However, this revaluation is not done through entrepreneurship: in fact it is not 'done' by Jamal at all. Rather, the film's melodramatic plot makes it entirely coincidental that the questions on the game show happen to match up with his past experiences. Far from entrepreneurship, Jamal sits in the 'hot seat' and the money comes to him.

Conversely, the true entrepreneur in *Slumdog Millionaire* is Jamal's brother Salim. Unlike Jamal, he must fight to build a life for himself. Because of his underprivileged background, he finds success only in the underworld – and that too by actively betraying his brother and by pursuing a life of money by means of violence. From his boyhood in a slum, he gains access to a large house and other riches. Thus when he sits with Jamal after their reunion in an unfinished high-rise and talks about the growth of the city around him, and how he is 'at the centre of the centre', this is not as much the reflections of a successful entrepreneur as an articulation of the close link between self-realization and violence. For Salim, this link becomes too much to bear, so that at the end of the film the 'successful' entrepreneur has no option but to commit suicide. His decision to shoot himself while sitting in a bathtub full of money underlines his awareness of the complicity of enterprise in his melancholy.

Enterprise revolution

The most surprising ironization of entrepreneurship comes from contemporary Indian novelist Chetan Bhagat, with whose non-fictional works this chapter began. Bhagat's popularity, his advocacy of entrepreneurship, and his vocal involvement in public issues, have made him a representative voice of the new middle class. His fiction represents middle-class aspirations in contemporary urban India and thus features many young characters who believe in the value of determining one's own destiny – and who act on that belief. And yet, despite their use of the language of enterprise, his novels simultaneously outline the limitations of enterprise culture. From his first novel, *One Night @ the Call Centre* (2005), to his most recent, *Revolution 2020* (2011), we see a deep, even at times poignant condemnation of the price of narrow entrepreneurialism that must be paid by India's young people. In *One Night*, this is revealed in Vroom's realization that despite the money in call-centre work and the prospect of social mobility it offers, there is a cost as well: 'I like jeans, mobiles and pizzas. I earn, I eat, I buy shit and I die. That is all the fuck there is to Vroom. It is all bullshit man' (Bhagat 2005: 214). Here, liberalization, consumption, and the retreat of the government that Bhagat celebrates in his articles do not result in freedom for his characters, but in further oppression.

Revolution 2020 is a more extended consideration of the implications of the enterprise narrative for India's youth. Its central character, Gopal, is another entrepreneur-protagonist. Raised in a lower-middle-class household in Varanasi, where his father is too sick to work, Gopal has fallen consistently short of a qualifying score in the admissions tests for engineering colleges, which thus

prevents him from embarking on the conventional path to social mobility. Even after spending his father's entire savings on expensive private coaching classes, he still fails to make the grade. At this point Gopal decides to take his future in his own hands and establish a coaching school of his own. Despite having to navigate a corrupt system, he works hard and ends up opening his own school, GangaTech, making significant amounts of money and a name for himself. Moving out of his one-room abode, he acquires a bungalow and a Mercedes; he drinks expensive whisky and wears custom-made suits. Largely because of this success, he even wins Aarti, the woman of his dreams, who had chosen his friend Raghav in preference to him several years earlier. He has everything that he could want:

> I could be engaged to [Aarti] next week, married in three months. In a year, I could be an MLA. My university approvals would come within the space of a heartbeat. I could expand into medicine, MBA, coaching, aviation. Given how much Indians cared about education, the sky would be the limit. Forget Aarti becoming a flight attendant, I could buy her a plane. If I played my cards right, I could also rise up the party ranks. I had lived alone too long. I could start a family, and have lots of beautiful kids with Aarti. They would grow up and take over the family businesses and political empire. This is how people become big in India. I could become really big.
>
> (Bhagat 2011: 266–7)

However, this success does not satisfy Gopal. Far from producing an entirely new self-realizing subject, entrepreneurial success makes Gopal melancholic, even suicidal. As he soon realizes, in his search for wealth and fulfilment he has lost his moral compass and his happiness, so that his 'big house [is] as empty as [his] soul' (ibid.: 290). In this he contrasts with his childhood friend Raghav, his doppelganger in the novel. Raghav, although he had performed very well in the IIT entrance exams, gives up his engineering studies in order to set up a political newspaper, with the intention of beginning a 'revolution', to 'dismantle the old corrupt system and put a new one in place' (ibid.: 197). In this self-published paper, Raghav writes scathing exposés of the very politicians on whom Gopal finds himself dependent to fund GangaTech. At first, Gopal is disdainful of Raghav's sacrifice of his financial and professional prospects for some unfounded ideals; he dismisses him as 'borderline cuckoo, with his pink newspaper.… Our college would make a crore this year. Raghav would never see a crore of his own in his entire fucked-up honest revolutionary life' (ibid.: 209). However, what he eventually discovers is that his own success is hollow without any morals; and that, despite not being rich, Raghav is the better man. Once he realizes this, he gets Raghav a job and even creates a scenario that turns Aarti away from him and back towards Raghav.

The story that seemed to celebrate entrepreneurship thus becomes a cautionary tale about the corrupting influence of excessive wealth on a person's character. Gopal works hard and is 'a successful man', but the question that continues

to haunt him nonetheless is '*are you a good person*?' (Bhagat 2011: 267). The influence of the cut-and-dried morality of popular Hindi cinema is clear here; what is surprising is how much the influence is taken from a pre-liberalization generation of Hindi film in which money was seen as inherently corrupting.[21] By contrast, newer Hindi cinema is much more comfortable showing excessive wealth, even going so far as to tie it to a certain model of cosmopolitan heroism. By these accounts, economic liberalization removed the moral stigma from conspicuous consumption and other signs of wealth, freeing Indian protagonists to make money and spend as they desire. For an author associated with the new, growth-friendly India – and indeed, one who supports this 'new India' in his non-fictional writings – such a parable seems surprising.

In fact, *Revolution 2020* does not amount to a scathing critique of the enterprise narrative – one that simply condemns all its participants to the realm of moral depravity. Rather, it enacts a much more subtle judgement, whose nature becomes clear in the novel's ending. As we learn in the Epilogue, even after realizing his moral degradation, and giving up Aarti as a means of redeeming himself, Gopal continues to grow his business; in fact, in order to distract himself from his misery, he works even harder than before. Thus he is not fully redeemed, but only partly so. This ambivalence means that when Gopal asks the author, at the end of the novel, whether he is 'worthy enough to be a hero in your story', the author initially hesitates. It is only later, on his way to the airport, that he thinks about it a little further, sifts through the story of Gopal's life, and changes his mind. He calls Gopal to tell him, in the novel's final line, that 'You are a good person' (Bhagat 2011: 296). This hesitation is, we believe, significant, and registers the novel's particular space of critique. On the one hand, Gopal does not give up his business to start a political broadsheet of his own; unlike Raghav, he will not visibly contribute to a 'Revolution 2020'. He plainly admits that Raghav will make a better MLA than he, because 'What would I have done? Made more money. With him, there is a chance he could change something' (ibid.: 294). These are the reasons why the author cannot designate him 'good' straight away. What seems to turn Bhagat in Gopal's favour is the fact that, alongside the sacrifice of his own love of Aarti, Gopal seems to register a deep awareness of the insufficiency of the enterprise narrative, *at the same time as* he understands its utility and its effectiveness as a means to better his lot. This recognition of the gap between the narrative of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial subject is something that has appeared throughout this chapter, for example in the activism of citizens' groups. In animating this gap in fiction, Bhagat seems to suggest that it is a site of morality: a place where a morally ambiguous character can turn into 'a good man', or, in an extra-literary sense, where a 'neoliberal' citizens' convener can make a progressive political alliance. Although Bhagat makes no direct connections between this space of morality and the potential for meaningful social change – and certainly not revolution in the way in which it is conventionally defined – a link is suggested in the novel's title, which, although referring to the name of Raghav's newspaper, also works as a metatextual signifier to Bhagat's own text: *Revolution 2020* as Bhagat's

own, unlikely, and somewhat idiosyncratic political 'manifesto'. From this perspective, there is only a short distance between Gopal being 'a good man' and social change. Although the means of achieving this social change is not articulated in the text, what is clear is that social change lies only partly in entrepreneurship, and partly in other kinds of self-imaginings, including the kind of moral worth that comes from acting, even if occasionally, on behalf of others' fulfilment rather than one's own.

Thus, despite Chetan Bhagat's strong support of innovation and entrepreneurialism in *What Young India Wants*, in his fiction he represents the way in which enterprise culture remakes subjects only in part, leaving them the space to question these very ideals. The author's revised judgement on Gopal seems to suggest that this space of questioning is a crucial one, but also one that is complicit; it is a space of judgement, but not one of detachment; it is a space born of an investment in the enterprise narrative but not completely contained within it. In this we see a significantly more subtle framing of the political ethics of enterprise, beyond either celebratory acceptance or straightforward critique.

Conclusion

Ironically, both supporters and detractors of enterprise culture subscribe to a similar assumption of its pervasiveness and its ability to remake subjects in its image. Indeed, as we have shown throughout this chapter, it is clear that the language of entrepreneurship has penetrated into many aspects of politics and literary representation over the last two decades. However, tracing the wide circulation of this language in contemporary India reveals it to exist in an ambivalent relationship to the 'Shining India' rhetoric of liberalization of which it is a product. Civic activists enact an entrepreneurial citizenship by taking matters into their own hands, but they have an antagonistic relationship with the new real-estate and consumption-driven economies of India's cities, and to other modes of entrepreneurship that advance collective demands. Likewise, literary texts as varied as *The White Tiger*, *Revolution 2020*, and *Slumdog Millionaire* are products of a liberalized India while also critical of its associated ideals. All these works portray the entrepreneur as a refracted, unstable figure. Rather than reinforcing the entrepreneur as a normative subject, these texts offer an ironic take on entrepreneurship, revealing it to be not an overarching logic, but a narrative and, at times, bordering on farce. These are popular texts, yet they exhibit an ambivalent relationship with the worlds of which they are a part: they ironize the enterprise culture that is celebrated in the very mainstream culture that enables them.

The stakes of this analysis are significant for the future of political life in urban India. While celebrants of entrepreneurship foresee the liberation of the middle classes from the restrictions of both government corruption and other forms of 'vote-bank' accountability to the poor, its critics predict a more dire future in which the promises of Indian democracy are foreclosed for the sake of narrow political interests masquerading as those of the 'universal' citizenry.

Without attending to the partiality of this discourse, both views end up rendering homogeneous what is in fact a diverse and fractured landscape, in which there is no consensus on what enterprise is or what it means for people in their daily lives. As we have tried to show, the moments when enterprise fails to remake subjects are equally important as the moments when it succeeds; in the gap between the ideal entrepreneur and the reality of enterprise lie a vast range of productive and complex practices and representations that constitute the variegated and as-yet indeterminate domain of subject formation in contemporary India.

Filmography

Amar Akbar Anthony (1977) directed by Manmohan Desai, Hirawat Jain and Co.
Bobby (1973) directed by Raj Kapoor, R.K. Films Ltd.
Guide (1965) directed by Vijay Anand, Navketan International.
Kahaani (2012) directed by Sujoy Ghosh, Boundscript.
Lage Raho Munna Bhai (2006) directed by Rajkumar Hirani, Vinod Chopra.
Munnabhai M.B.B.S. (2003) directed by Rajkumar Hirani, Vinod Chopra.
No One Killed Jessica (2011) directed by Rajkumar Gupta, UTV Spotboy.
Pyaasa (1957) directed by Guru Dutt, Guru Dutt Films.
Slumdog Millionaire (2008) directed by Danny Boyle, Celador.
Viruddh (2005) directed by Mahesh Manjrekar, Amitabh Bachchan Corporation Ltd.

Notes

1 See www.jagritiyatra.com/about/.
2 Ibid.
3 'Hazare, Ramdev plan joint offensive', *The Hindu*, 17 July 2012, available online at: www.thehindu.com/news/national/article3648718.ece, accessed 28 February 2013.
4 Full bibliographic details for all films referenced are included in the Filmography section at the end of this chapter.
5 As Gandhi wrote in a letter in 1919, '[Y]ou can serve the country only with this body' (quoted in Alter 1996: 301).
6 See also Mazzarella (2003) on the resignification of development in terms of the satisfaction of desires.
7 The wide-ranging effects of a neoliberal ideology are discussed globally by Brenner and Theodore 2002b; Paley 2001; and Ong 2006; and in India by Banerjee-Guha 2009; Mankekar 2011; and Oza 2006.
8 'Mumbai's first citizens' corporator loses race', *Indian Express*, 18 February 2013, available online at: www.indianexpress.com/news/mumbai-s-first-citizens–corporator-loses-race/913696, accessed 1 March 2013.
9 Amberish Diwanji, 'Middle-class climbs electoral bandwagon as citizen candidates', *Daily News & Analysis*, 25 January 2012, available online at: www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_middle-class-climbs-electoral-bandwagon-as-citizen-candidates_1641886, accessed 28 February 2013.
10 While a few citizen candidates won municipal elections in the mid-2000s, the revolution subsequently stalled. In 2012, for instance, only one independent candidate won a municipal election. This widespread failure was attributed to the lack of turnout

among the middle class: 'Citizen candidates appealed [*sic*] has been primarily to the middle class. Unfortunately, they have not voted in the kind of numbers one expected', an activist is quoted as saying.Yogesh Sadhwani, 'Citizen candidates crash and burn', *Mumbai Mirror*, 18 February 2012, available online at: www.mumbaimirror.com/index.aspx?page=article&sectid=2&contentid=20120218201202180254011675019c858, accessed 1 February 2013.

11 'Vote, For Yourself!', *The Juhu Citizen*, April 2004, publication of the Juhu Citizens Welfare Group, available online at: www.juhucitizen.org/issues/april04.htm, accessed 28 February 2013.

12 See http://mumbaicitizensgroup.org/index.html.

13 Kajal Iyer, 'Mumbai: citizen groups take charge of BMC polls', *CNN-IBN*, 22 November 2011, available online at: http://ibnlive.in.com/news/mumbai-citizen-groups-take-charge-of-bmc-polls/204523–3.html, accessed 1 February 2013.

14 www.nagaralliance.org/hnh.html. Accessed 14 January 2008.

15 Preety Acharya, 'Millionaire paanwala family members attack each other with sticks and iron rods', *Mumbai Mirror*, 2 August 2011, available online at: www.mumbaimirror.com/article/2/20110802201108020527444421c2880f7e/Millionaire-paanwala-family-members-attack-each-other-with-sticks-and-iron-rods.html, accessed 1 March 2013.

16 Kunal Purohit, 'Open spaces in prime real estate areas are most at risk', *Hindustan Times*, 18 September 2012, available online at: www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/Mumbai/Open-spaces-in-prime-real-estate-areas-are-most-at-risk/Article1–931676.aspx, accessed 21 February 2013.

17 Ibid.

18 'City's fisherfolk demand a say in coastal road proposal', *The Times of India*, 30 October 2011, available online at: http://articles.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/2011–10–30/mumbai/30338848_1_bandra-worli-sea-link-fisherfolk-tunnels, accessed 21 February 2013.

19 Ashutosh Shukla, 'Agni keeps Crawford Market issue burning', *Daily News & Analysis*, 15 October 2007, available online at: www.dnaindia.com/mumbai/report_agni-keeps-crawford-market-issue-burning_1127690, accessed 21 February 2013.

20 'Citispace convenor threatened days before firing at Kathpalia's home', *Mumbai Mirror*, 11 January 2010, available online at: www.mumbaimirror.com/index.aspx?Page=article&sectname=News%20-%20City&sectid=2&contentid=20100111201001110208223128 04d35c7, accessed 21 February 2013.

21 For instance, in pre-liberalization films as diverse as *Pyaasa, Guide, Amar Akbar Anthony*, and *Bobby*, the simple acquisition of wealth turns good characters into morally compromised ones.

12 Margins and mindsets

Enterprise, opportunity, and exclusion in a market town in Madhya Pradesh

Mekhala Krishnamurthy

The changing composition and cultures of *mandi* trading

> We have to find ways to change our thoughts and our tendencies, or we will lose out very quickly. As far as I can see, what used to be commercial is now social. And what used to be social is commercial. Just look at wheat: it all goes to the government, with a bonus for the farmer and a huge subsidy to poor consumers. In the process, private procurement and trading in wheat is being finished off. But what used to be social, especially health clinics and schools, is now fully commercial. There is great scope in this area for anyone who can find a way to get in!

These comments of a trader in a wholesale grain market in central India are emblematic of changing approaches to enterprise, and the reformulation of its meanings and practice, even at the heart of 'old'-style business. At a time when globalized India's 'new' entrepreneurs are attracting a great deal of attention and analysis, this chapter centres on a more traditional entrepreneurial business community and their responses to and reflections on the rapid and complex changes transforming the economy and society within which they live and work. It is focused on the changing composition and cultures of grain merchants and traders operating in local *mandis* – wholesale markets for agricultural produce. In doing so, it seeks to show how these deep, if often unnoticed, changes and the local commentaries that accompany them contribute distinctive, critical perspectives to our understanding of enterprise cultures in contemporary India. This chapter anchors the study of contemporary enterprise cultures within critical analyses of a changing political economy and its diverse and differentiated effects. Equally, and just as important, it also considers how these processes were, at every instance, a question of changing mindsets, where the larger shifts in political economy were instantiated in personal narrative and local experience, and were intimately tied to the self-image, skills, and sensibilities of traders, of different kinds and sizes. It is this changing culture of enterprise and its dynamics and dilemmas that this chapter explores.

Mandis, or primary agricultural markets, are old and ubiquitous institutions across many parts of the Indian economic landscape. Wherever they form, they

are usually dense sites of economic, social, and political activity, connecting and shaping the relations between town and countryside, and between local markets for commodities and larger circuits of capital and commerce. *Mandis* evolved to organize the exchange between farmers who needed to sell their produce and traders and other procurers of agricultural commodities. Around this fundamental interaction there has developed a complex regulatory framework and network of relationships, which not only involve the primary buyers and sellers, but also include myriad and minute interactions between labourers, state agencies, corporations, and a wide range of information brokers and logistics operators. Across *mandis*, one tends to find that certain principles, processes, and practices of exchange and trade are observed and enacted, place after place, time after time. And yet *mandis* also have rather particular procedures and personalities of their own, steeped in regional histories and ecologies, shaped by local characters, chronologies, and crop varieties.

The centre of action in this chapter is Harda *mandi*, a regulated Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee (APMC) in Harda town, a small but bustling market town with a population of 65,000 (Census 2001) and the administrative headquarters of Harda district, an agriculturally productive district located in the central Indian state of Madhya Pradesh (MP).[1] Harda is a major regional market for two commodities, soybean and wheat, which dominate the two post-harvest peak seasons in the *mandi*, although the market yard receives arrivals throughout the year. The core material presented here is based on 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted between 2008 and 2010 and is drawn from sustained observation, in-depth interviews, and immersion in the everyday activities of the market during four consecutive marketing seasons.

One cannot begin to understand the current life of the market, however, without also quickly becoming absorbed in its myriad life histories and in the complex narratives of the last three decades (1980–2010) of economic, social, and political transformation. These narratives swept, switched, and integrated a variety of scales and periods, moving between global and national forces, regional political economies and social histories, and local characters, events, and experiences to describe a number of remarkable and interacting changes. These included the coming of canal irrigation in the early 1980s; the introduction of soybean, the erasure of cotton, and the expansion of wheat between 1980 and the mid 1990s; the abolition of old market practices, shifting market spaces, and new regulatory systems in different waves over the last 30 years; the adoption of new forms of mechanization and technologies; the entry and expansion of corporate capital and the availability of diverse sources of credit, especially over the last decade; the penetration of electronic commodity exchanges since 2003; and changing state price-support policies, including the dramatic expansion of government wheat procurement here since 2008. To make sense of all this, my research focused on the experiences of the different individuals and institutions involved in making and managing the *mandi* – farmers, traders, labourers, *mandi* functionaries, state agencies, regional processors, and private corporations – exploring the changes over time in its spatial

dimensions, material composition, market practices, forms of intermediation, and social relations.

These movements have had profound effects on the character and composition of traders in Harda *mandi*, where, as in much of the region, the traditional trading (*bania*) castes, the Agrawals, Jains, and Maheshwaris, have long dominated the local grain trade, with a few new entrants from other castes, including a few Gujjars, small Teli traders, and one Sikh wheat specialist. Over time, through both forceful breaks and subtle shifts in market power, there have been important changes in the types of intermediaries, transactional forms, and market practices operating in the *mandi*, each activating particular kinds of inclusion and exclusion, bringing great flux and fluctuating fortunes. At the heart of this process are changing mindsets, to which I now turn.

Making margins in the naughty nineties

As the first decade of the twenty-first century drew to a close, traders in Harda *mandi* could be heard frequently lamenting the demise of trading. '*Vyapaar vyapaar nahi raha*,' I would be told time and again: 'Trade is not trade any longer'. Unfortunately for me, traders would often add, I could not be expected to appreciate this fully, since I had experienced the *mandi* only as it is today. By the time I arrived as a student of *mandi* life in 2008, Harda, like most major soybean *mandis* in Madhya Pradesh, was organized along the lines of an *arhat pratha*, or commission-based system. As a result, a small group of *arhatiyas* (commission agents), four of the leading local trading firms, controlled the majority of soybean procurement in Harda *mandi*, managing major commissions for the biggest regional processors and corporations, with another two or three firms holding more minor commissions. Since 2008, moreover, the market for wheat had been effectively taken out of traders' hands completely, as the state government had repeatedly announced a substantial 'bonus' for farmers in addition to the Minimum Support Price (MSP) and had dramatically expanded its wheat-procurement operations in major wheat centres like Harda, bypassing traders and appointing co-operative societies and state agencies to handle purchasing directly from farmers in the *mandi* and villages. With more than 70 active licences but a group of only around 25 regular, year-round traders in the *mandi*, most firms, especially medium-sized trading concerns, were finding it harder to survive in this line of business as every year passed. I should really have been around in the 1990s, they never failed to remind me, when the *maahol*, the atmosphere among *mandi* traders, was completely different. Then, I would have seen an *asli* (genuine) *vyaapari* or trading *mandi*, where they were all 'running their own minds' in order to make all sorts of margins.

By all accounts, the decade from the late 1980s to the late 1990s was an especially productive stretch for trading in the *mandi*. In Harda, it was defined by the conjunction of a relatively new commodity, around which there was considerable regional dynamism, and the entry of a new group of traders, who were ready to make some bold moves in a *mandi* adjusting to a new regulatory order.

By this point, soybean, which had begun arriving in the *mandi* in the early 1980s, had established itself as the main *kharif* (monsoon) crop in Harda. Spurred by conducive government export policies, which made soymeal or de-oiled cake (DOC) a lucrative source of foreign-exchange earnings in an otherwise heavily protected trade regime, this agro-processing sector attracted established corporate houses as well as a number of regional agro-commercial capitalists, based primarily in the city of Indore, who had rather rapidly invested in setting up processing plants in Madhya Pradesh. As a result, there was increasing demand for soybean in the state and all sorts of new opportunities for local traders able to purchase soybean in the *mandi*. As the area under soybean cultivation was still expanding, and new locations were developing, processors and major commodity traders needed to deal with a range of suppliers through the regional *mandi* trading network. This created a dynamic trading environment, where traders could deliver soybean to plants at their daily buying price, which, even after adding the costs of transportation and handling, still enabled them to make a margin.

Among those looking to seize such openings in Harda were a few newly licensed firms, which entered the *mandi* even as the last remaining agents from an older era of market organization were leaving the yard. In the early-mid 1980s, the MP government had taken aggressive actions to abolish a layer of *mandi* commission agents, intermediaries who worked between farmers and larger buyers, advancing credit to cultivators and auctioning their commodities in return. This was a highly politically charged move with complex consequences, which I have explored at length elsewhere (Krishnamurthy 2011). In the *mandi*, it eliminated a set of 35–40 commission agents who had leveraged their village ties and rotated limited capital to run their credit-based businesses; and it transferred market management, initially somewhat ineffectively and later much more substantively, from the private control and infrastructure of traders to the state-appointed *Mandi* Committee and its functionaries. While the larger trading firms, especially those who had exercised a grip on the local market through cotton (replaced by soybean in the 1980s), were adjusting to the new system, these young traders, some of whom emerged from the ranks of *munims* (accountants and field managers) of old and established firms, now began aggressively pursuing commercial connections in the soybean trade. Without the benefit or burden of employees, they relied on their personal skill and effort, and were prepared to travel the extra distance and cultivate the smallest connections in order to establish themselves. Looking back, they acknowledge that a number of factors came together at that time to make it a particularly conducive environment for their initiatives, identifying several conditions that made these transactions profitable for *mandi* traders and shaped the relations between them.

First, due to a limited communications infrastructure, there prevailed considerable price differentials between trading locations, differences that exceeded the costs of transportation between them. Up until the late 1980s and early 1990s, Harda's traders were still using telegrams to access information about prices and purchasing orders. Gradually operator-based telephone lines

started working in the town, and then fixed lines were installed in shops during the first half of the 1990s. Everyone to whom I spoke said that prices responded quickly, and the differentials discernibly diminished with each subsequent improvement in communications technology. Meanwhile, however, *mandi* traders had capitalized on the asymmetries. Laughing, a trader remembered how he had once managed to bribe the local telephone operator with a quintal of *moong* (green gram) to delay transmitting vital information about a change in prices in Indore to other traders in Harda *mandi* for a few crucial hours, until he had derived the maximum benefit from the information himself

> I did very well that day', he chuckled. 'But can you imagine that such a thing was still possible then? Chances like that would often come up. Today, everyone has their mobile phones plastered to their ears on the auction platform and we get SMSs throughout the day. You can't hide information on prices so easily any more.

Second, the slower transmission of information also meant that price fluctuations and volatility were not felt with great frequency in the *mandi*. Instead, not only did prices tend to reign within a certain range for longer stretches of time, but traders were also able to benefit from the fairly reliable post-harvest to off-season rise in prices for soybean and *chana* (gram). The 1990s, therefore, saw a number of stockists take up licences in the *mandi*, not for regular, day-to-day trading operations but for seasonal stocking activities. For full-time firms, trading and stocking went together, with a constant rotation of cash and commodities through *arhats* and trading, as well as a certain proportion being stocked, depending on their seasonal credit requirements and market analysis. Of course, there were unexpected reversals and losses on stocks from time to time, but traders report that overall this was a decade when they found stocking to be a profitable strategy. Indeed, stocking was considered an integral part of *mandi* trading until quite recently. Over the last few years, however, this confidence has been greatly eroded. Now, as a result of the constant movement and transmission of price signals, traders experience the effects of fluctuations and volatility much more quickly. In quick succession, moreover, traders had been caught off-guard, sitting on stocks when there were dramatic turnarounds in *chana* and soybean prices, having bought at buoyant prices during peak season and suffering from significant drops in off-season rates. In addition, the rates for all three commodities in the *mandi* – soybean, wheat, and *chana* – had more than doubled over the last few years. This made stocking both less feasible and more risky: you not only tie up more capital for that period of time, but you find that the consequences of a loss become more devastating. As a trader explained

> It is one thing to stock at Rs.600–700 per quintal, quite another to build stocks at Rs.2,000–2,200. Now, we need to rotate the cash, and in any case we have completely lost confidence in stocking in this sort of market.

The old game was a long one, often stretching over a period of months. This is no longer seen to be viable. As a medium-size trader explained:

> The pattern has changed. If you see an opportunity and feel confident in your reading, then you might try to buy and stock a little more than you need to for a few days, and if the prices rise as you expected, then you will just integrate this stock into the lot that you have been commissioned for at a higher rate a few days later, or look for a larger local buyer. But you won't wait long, holding up your cash and risking a fall in prices. It's a much more limited game.

Malpractices in the *mandi* system, of which falsified weights were the most apparent, constituted the third means of augmenting trading margins. All *mandi* participants – farmers, traders, labourers, and yard functionaries – agreed that until the end of the 1990s, marked in *mandi* chronology by an epic battle to introduce an electronic weighbridge and other measures to address farmers' grievances, the *mandi* was very weak in terms of ensuring fair weights to farmers. During this time, traders and labourers devised a wide range of strategies, subtle and audacious, to siphon farmers' produce as it moved through the yard. In addition to widespread malpractices in weighing and the more limited (but still notable) practice of delayed payments, weak monitoring and regulation during this time also meant that the evasion of *mandi* fees was especially common. *Mandi* functionaries admit that this was a time when they struggled to adequately prevent the evasion: there was no advance fee collection, the inspection system was weak, fines were low, and there were varied opportunities for *Number 2-level kaam* (illegal work).

If regulatory flux and disorder in the *mandi* worked to the advantage of local traders, the changes in cultivation patterns outside in Harda's fields during this same period provided a fourth factor to facilitate trading by creating a greater diversity of options for commodity trade. Although by the early 1990s cotton and a variety of other intercropped pulses and coarse grains had disappeared from local production, and soybean and wheat had emerged as the two major crops, this was also a time of considerable experimentation, especially in the varieties of wheat and *chana* grown by farmers. As these commodities have differentiated retail markets, small- and medium-sized traders were able to specialize in building their skills and contacts in specific qualities and varieties of grain and gram. As a result, there was something for everyone, or at least greater possibilities for a larger number of traders, even after the biggest traders had purchased in significant volumes. Today, the agricultural produce coming into the *mandi* has become much more homogeneous, shrinking the scope for specialization and further favouring bulk buyers.

Finally, traders recall that their ties during this period were strengthened by their credit needs. 'That was a time', a trader explained:

> when most of us, especially the new firms, were always short on capital. No one had large bank limits then, and we depended significantly on informal

> credit sources and on extending credit to each other in the *mandi* on a regular basis.

This had two implications for the distribution of commodities among traders in the *mandi*. First, as large traders burned through their balances during the day, medium- and small-size traders could enter the market and buy up modest volumes. Second, since traders were engaged in more frequent exchanges of credit among themselves, they were somewhat more invested in each other's performance and were less likely to try to out-bid competing firms in the auction. As a result, it was generally recalled that the major traders were more likely to take others along, and that even minor actors were regularly able to take advantage of opportunities to successfully bid for lots. This was in sharp contrast to the sentiments expressed in the *mandi* today, where the largest commission agents were known to prevent even a single lot going to a smaller trader. Most traders report better access to institutional credit and a resultant reduction in their interdependence on each other. The one or two trading firms known for still borrowing heavily from local traders and informal sources, and for consistently over-leveraging themselves, were the subject of much criticism and even ridicule among their peers.

The period stretching from the late 1980s through much of 1990s, then, is remembered in Harda *mandi* as a great time for trading, rife with opportunities for expanding one's margins. At the heart of this dynamism was an important conjunction: the arrival of a relatively new commodity – soybean – and the entry of a new crop of small- and medium-sized firms into the *mandi*. In their reflections, traders drew attention to the interactions between these two factors and their role in influencing the character of *mandi* trade in Harda. A trader whose father had worked as a manager for one of the biggest firms in the *mandi*, and who had entered the *mandi* in his mid-twenties in the mid 1990s, analysed this interaction as follows.

> In my experience, I have observed that whenever there is a new commodity, it is the medium-sized traders who take the lead. They step forward first, figure out what the market is all about, take the risks, and make the effort. The large firms, they tend to be more cautious, they try to stay with the old pattern, where they were established players. Only when the strategies become clear, when others have shown how to work and make profits in the new system, the big players catch on and use their capital and reputation to take on major deals. That is when they start taking over again. But it is the new firms who are initially ready to put in their own labour, raise resources, chase the connections. The big *seths* [traders] are generally used to having large staffs and *munims* [accountants] assigned to everything. If you are personally supervising the process, you are more likely to make money at every step and get the hang of the trade faster. I suppose this is true not only in the *mandi* line but in other sectors as well.

Today, however, only one of the new firms from that period had grown to join the five largest firms in the *mandi*, and this firm too was now part of a system that was seen to increasingly exclude medium- and small-size traders, concentrating commercial activity in fewer hands.

Commissions, concentration, and constriction

While the 1990s are recalled as a productive period for trading, *arhats* (fixed commission-based arrangements between *mandi* firms and larger buyers) have also been associated with the soybean market from early on in its development in Madhya Pradesh. Initially, *arhats* co-existed with trading, where individual firms, which were not in longer-term agreements but worked through brokers, found that they could still profitably deliver to soybean plants after factoring in the costs of handling and transportation. Towards the end of the decade and into the next one, however, after a great deal of churning and consolidation in the soybean-processing industry, commission-based buying became the dominant mode of *mandi*-level procurement. As the importance of *arhats* expanded, moreover, the major commissions in *mandi*s like Harda began to be concentrated among a few large trading firms. In addition, both the principals and agents involved in these arrangements agree that from around 1995–1996, *arhats* were defined by increasingly stringent conditions and became more constricting in character. In sharp contrast to the 'no claims' or lenient conditions that prevailed in the first half of the decade, soybean processors now imposed a system of 'claim conditions' on each delivery from their *arhatiyas*. This meant that if the plant determined that a given consignment failed to meet their quality specifications (on moisture, damaged seeds, and foreign material), they would make deductions from the 1 per cent commission that they paid the *arhatiya*. In addition, plants made their payments for the purchased quantities on the basis of the weight measured at the point of delivery and not according to the *mandi* weighing slip. *Arhatiyas* repeatedly complained that the differences in the readings cost them dearly, arguing that the plants had started using 'claim conditions' in unfair and exploitative ways, denying *arhatiyas* their full commission. From the perspective of the processors, however, such stringent claim conditions would not have been necessary if the *arhatiyas* had not abused their trust by trying to pass off poor-quality produce in the first place. The claim system, they argued, was the only way they could recover these costs and exert pressure on their *arhatiyas* to purchase according to their specifications.

While commission agents complained about the changing conditions, they were still doing solid business. Small- and medium-sized traders, on the other hand, began to find it increasingly difficult to engage in soybean trading and delivery to regional plants and processors. Firms buying on *arhat* conditions consistently outbid them on price, and after adding the costs of handling, storage, transportation, and fees, they were unable to make 'parity' for sale at the plant rates. During the season, those without fixed *arhats* were therefore rarely found

actively participating in the auction; and stocking, as mentioned earlier, had become an increasingly costly and risky proposition.

Arhats and *vyapaar*: profits and pride in the *mandi*

In the *mandi* the distinction between *arhats* and trading is more than a question of commissions and margins. It is a distinction that is intimately associated with questions of market identity, public image, and self-respect. On the one hand, holding on to a large and high-profile *arhat* with a major processor or company boosts your market reputation and signals a trader's financial capacity to invest in and manage significant volumes and a sizeable commission. Whenever I entered a *mandi* and expressed an interest in meeting its traders, not only in Harda but in other towns in Madhya Pradesh, I was almost always introduced to the biggest *arhatiyas* first, who immediately mentioned the major corporations whose commissions they held, quickly establishing their credentials as the leading figures in the local market. Large *arhats* facilitate further work, serving as a stamp of market standing, which, as one trader explained to me, not only helps to advance your commercial position, but also critically improves your 'credit rating' in the marriage market. Firms work hard to cultivate potential commissions and are quick to notice fraying relations within existing commissions among their counterparts. Losing a major commission, therefore, is a serious blow and is commonly interpreted as a sign of falling stature.

At the same time, if one spends enough time in the *mandi*, one is also almost certain to hear *arhatiyas* express their deep dissatisfaction, even bitterness, concerning the expansion of the *arhat pratha* and its terms and conditions. Even as *arhatiyas* prominently projected themselves as large commission agents, they also routinely voiced their frustration and resentment at the enforcement and exploitation of 'claim conditions' and criticized the ways in which larger and more powerful parties constrict their agents in the procurement chain as far as they possibly can. The changes in the character of *arhats*, moreover, are not only attributed to the constraints and challenges that soybean processors face in volatile global commodity markets, but are also related to the changing personnel and personalities of both regional processors and corporations. In the earlier period, *mandi* traders reflected, the owners of processing firms were often only a generation removed from the *mandi* themselves, and they knew how to build and maintain relationships with *mandi*-level traders, taking into account their economic constraints and cultural sensibilities. Even the corporations who entered the market at that time, traders recalled with considerable respect, had appointed 'field men' who, while they may not have grown up in trading families, had spent their early careers gaining experience on the ground, learning from their time among farmers and traders in different markets. Indeed, this is confirmed by the biographies of some of the leading executives in India's largest agri-business corporations, entrusted with setting up the new commodities and rural retail ventures for

both Indian and multinational companies. As I learned during interviews with them, they often shared a common path, having initially joined the sector, typically after training in rural management, by working for agricultural co-operatives and their federations in states like Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh in the 1980s. Today, however, *arhatiyas* felt that the most successful regional processors had started conforming to the 'corporate pattern', from being locally rooted *seths* to high-flying corporate *sahibs*. 'It is like going', as one *mandi* trader put it, 'from Dhirubhai Ambani, the great and heroic trader, to the next generation as Reliance, the mega corporation.' Meanwhile the experienced field managers in corporations had now become the CEOs, while the *arhatiyas* were left dealing with 'these MBA boys' who have no feel for the ground and would more than likely be transferred or move on to a new job in a matter of months in any case. As a result, *arhatiyas* felt that management had become much more rule-based and less experiential and that *arhats* had become much more stringent and less flexibly enforced. This change had also given rise, in the words of one irate *arhatiya*, to the sort of 'unthinkable' cultural insensitivity that serves meat dishes in the presence of proudly and purely vegetarian Marwari commission agents during meetings held in fancy five-star hotels!

Finally, even those who had the most well-established and cordial relations with their commissioning parties almost always felt that *arhats* were not as fulfilling as trading on one's own account. They acknowledged, of course, that *arhats* did provide a guaranteed line of business and assured income in increasingly volatile commodity markets. And yet traders of all sizes, including those who held prized *arhats* in the *mandi*, described their role as commission agents as akin to being someone else's *naukar* or servant, collecting your fixed *mazdoori* (wage) for specified services and nothing more. Of course, even under the fixed terms, there is scope for additional gains within the process, but traders in the *mandi* all agreed that *arhats* could not deliver the full rewards of trading. 'Buying for yourself', a large *arhatiya* said

> is another feeling altogether. It is not the same as handling and delivering *paraya maal*, another person's stock. In the end, *arhats* are about taking orders, following someone else's directions. They demand that you be service-minded. Trading is about applying your own mind, making your own moves. *Arhats* can never match the feeling of trading.'

A good *vyapaari*, moreover, another experienced *mandi* trader explained:

> is more likely to discover the true potential even within an *arhat*. He will know how to make the most of it. But, even then, it won't make him as happy as if he had traded in the open, with all the risks, taking his own position in the market. Where is the scope for that in the *mandi* line any longer? *Vyapaar niras ho gaya hai*. Trade has had all the juice – all the life – squeezed out of it.

Broken brokers

The shift to a predominantly commission-based system in the *mandi*, and the associated decline in trading, has severely affected another critical category of intermediaries operating in primary agricultural markets: brokers (Vidal 2000, 2003). Throughout the 1990s, Harda's traders had used the services of brokers to identify buyers for their stocks within Madhya Pradesh and in different parts of the country. Firms cultivated relationships with brokers based in Indore and also used the services of the three brokerage firms in Harda itself. By the time I began my fieldwork in 2008, these brokerage businesses had shrunk considerably. One of them had taken up a *mandi* licence and made a few purchases of *chana*, but was a weak presence in the *mandi*. Another had been more adventurous, had taken a line as a sub-broker for the electronic commodity exchange, and had installed the first such line in Harda in 2005. The third still opened his shop, but it was used only to disburse payments for purchases made by one of his nephews, a young trader who had set up a small firm in the *mandi* a few years ago. During afternoons, even in peak season, when I happened to walk past this shop, I would often find its owner stretched out, biding his time in a long, deep nap. Once when I went in, it was early evening and he was ready for tea. In the two hours that we spoke, his phone did not ring even once, and the only caller at the shop was the one farmer who had sold his lot to the nephew earlier that day. Our uninterrupted conversation on a trading day, he observed with a grimace, should be evidence enough of the state of his business. At least, he sighed, it might be good for research.

If I had done my fieldwork in the 1980s and 1990s, these brokerage firms would have been vital sites for research; hubs of information, their owners alert to everything going on in the *mandi*, constantly relaying the latest news from Indore and other commercial centres. Their shops would have been the first to acquire and upgrade their communication systems, from telegrams to telephone lines. If I had dropped by when this broker had begun his business, as a young man in the early 1980s, shortly after his old and esteemed family firm suffered a terrible setback in the post-Emergency crash in prices, I would have been lucky to find him here at all. He would have probably been doing his daily commute by train to the market town of Khandwa to visit his contacts and conduct all sorts of errands, related to both the business and personal affairs of his clients. Today, however, all that had changed.

First, brokers identified the expansion of the *arhat pratha* as a primary cause for the reduction in their business. As plants and companies began to establish direct commission-based relationships with *mandi* traders, they removed brokers from the equation. These large commercial actors also provided their *arhatiyas* with valuable information, not only about daily prices, but also seasonal price outlooks, information that was more timely and valuable than any that the local brokers could now provide. Moreover, as soybean arrivals in the *mandi* began to be primarily cleared through *arhats*, small- and medium-sized traders had much less need to negotiate deals through brokers.

Second, the services that brokers provided to fill gaps in infrastructure and communication were now quite clearly no longer required. There was a time when they were the owners of the few fixed lines installed in the town and were thoroughly immersed in information networks, which relied on frequent travel by themselves and other contacts. Now, with the ubiquitous mobile phone and the availability of constantly updated market information and analysis in the newspapers and business channels, they were no longer considered the sources of privileged information. With improved roads and transport connectivity, moreover, traders could easily send their own men to other regional centres, or to Indore and Bhopal, if their work required it.

Finally, in the current context, especially with rising commodity prices and volatility, they found that traders were willing to deal only with parties about whom they had a high level of information and personal assurance. This had become especially challenging over the last five years with the advent of the *dabba*, the *mandi*'s word for electronic futures trading. As a result, both brokers and traders felt that it was much harder to get a sense of the status of a party, since even if they looked reputable, you could never be sure that they had not over-leveraged and emptied themselves through losses on the *dabba*. Of course, breakdowns of trust were not new, and brokers had always had to worry about whether deliveries would be made and conditions of payment honoured, but with the most reputable plants and companies either dealing through their own *arhatiyas* or through larger brokers who handled big corporate business, it was harder to verify the credentials of those left in the trading line.

Overall, then, *mandi*-level brokers in places like Harda found that they had been bypassed by direct commissions and contacts, had been made redundant by new technologies and infrastructure, and were increasingly unable to guarantee the reputation and reliability of outside parties involved in the trade. To add to their frustration, it was increasingly apparent that brokerage, in its many manifestations, was thriving both above them and below. Above, within commodity-trading circles, those brokerage firms with direct access to corporate clients, export houses, and the exchanges, were in a different league. At the same time, brokerage has long existed and further erupted all around them, especially in local land and labour markets and in the form of the well-known and much-studied middleman, agents, and contractors who specialize in linking the poor to a whole range of public and private services, from bank-account opening to accessing a range of government schemes (Oldenburg 1987; Manor 2000; Corbridge *et al.* 2005; Jeffrey 2010; Harriss-White 2010; Witsoe 2011). *Mandi*-level brokers are unable to break through to the level above them in the commodity circuit and are entirely ill suited and unwilling to participate in what they regard as the degraded, distasteful, and even violent forms of rural brokerage flourishing below and all around them. In the brave new world of lobbyists and *thekkedars* (contractors), then, *mandi*-level brokers in Harda can be found sitting this round out.

Physical markets and futures exchanges

During my seasons of fieldwork in the *mandi*, if there was one subject upon which traders of all shapes and sizes expressed resounding agreement, it was on the detrimental and dangerous effects of the *dabba*. They were referring to the national electronic commodity exchanges, trading platforms in commodity futures, which had entered the *mandi*s in Madhya Pradesh soon after the watershed decision taken by the government in 2003 to authorize derivatives trading in the form of futures contracts across agricultural commodities, more than 50 years after they had been banned from Indian markets. This decision was part of a long and on-going battle to regulate futures trading in India, which has a complex and contentious history involving the development of regional exchanges across a variety of commodities, and has been the source of regulatory and moral dilemmas for colonial and post-colonial authorities preoccupied with the economic and social effects of the 'indigenous' (especially Marwari) predilection for speculation (Dantwala 1937; Timberg 1978; Birla 2009). The lifting of prohibitions on a final set of 54 commodities in 2003 completed a process of opening up forward trading that had been initiated in 1999; and in 2003, with the development of three national electronic exchanges, contracts were developed for a growing number of commodities, both agricultural (including soybean and wheat) and non-agricultural (such as metal, bullion, and crude). These platforms experienced a swift growth in their trading volumes, and by 2008 'more than 3,000 members had registered with the exchanges', and 'more than 20,000 terminals spread over more than 800 towns and cities of the country' had sprung up to provide access to new trading platforms (Ministry of Consumer Affairs 2008: 4).

Mandi traders in Harda frequently accuse the *dabba* of significantly compromising physical trade in agricultural commodities. First, as a result of the ubiquitous presence of mobile phones in the *mandi*, fluctuations on the exchange were now transmitted with great frequency to spot markets, where they had an almost immediate effect on auction prices, making them hypersensitive and increasingly vulnerable to volatility. When the auction opened at 11.00 a.m. in Harda, the first thing that traders would do was to check prices on the *dabba* and then watch for further signals throughout the day. I observed numerous occasions when the *mandi* price would suddenly dip or surge at a certain point in a session soon after traders were alerted to a movement on the NCDEX. For those who work in 'the physical' markets (*physical mein kaam karte hai*), and certainly for anxious farmers, this sort of fluctuation in prices was a new and unsettling experience.

Second, *mandi* traders associated the recent reversals in the order of price movements over the course of a season with powerful speculative activities on the exchanges. In 2009, the unprecedented swell in soybean prices during the peak season was attributed by everyone in the market – *mandi* traders, processors, and even exchange operators – to the speculative positions taken by a small group of major players in both the futures and physical markets.[2] The dramatic

contradiction between the data on 'market fundamentals' and the signals from the electronic exchanges and spot markets was viewed by *mandi* traders with anxiety, as they tried to make the most of the movement, but for the most part were left with unsold stocks when prices fell. *Maang aur purti*, demand and supply, *mandi* traders would frequently explain, seemed to have a diminishing role in physical markets these days. The exchanges, they felt, had enabled speculators to influence markets much more quickly and with greater effect than ever before.

Third, in the brief time that it had been in existence, *mandi* traders said that the *dabba* had wreaked havoc on a large number of small- and medium-size traders in market towns across Madhya Pradesh, had ruined professional reputations, and had broken down trust between trading parties and within trading families. In their view, the *dabba* was nothing more than 'state-approved *satta*' or gambling, where a large number of people with no relationship to or knowledge of the physical commodity participated in the exchange. As physical traders, no doubt, they all admitted, they should have known better. On the other hand, they argued that the serious decline in physical trade, especially among small- and medium-sized firms as discussed above, had in fact now made them even more susceptible to ensnarement by the *dabba*. In Harda, in an account similar to those from other market towns in the region, the period between 2004 and 2006 had seen almost every firm in the *mandi* try their hand on the exchange (Kumar 2010). Almost everyone, however, reported having been adversely affected in the process. After this, large *mandi* players declared that they had backed out so that they did not risk losing their commissions and credibility by gaining reputations for playing on the exchanges, although the two sub-brokers in Harda did indicate that not all of them had been able to resist taking positions covertly. On the other hand, it was well known that some of the weaker firms still continued to lose on their electronic trades, and that the problem was especially severe in one or two families, where the younger generation had become addicted to trading. Whenever I encountered one of these young men hanging out by the screen during afternoon drop-ins at the *dabba*, he would remind me not to mention this to his poor father and aggravate the old man's ill-health. As we sat around the computer, discussing the pernicious effects of this form of futures trading, there was a general consensus that it was reinforcing a vicious cycle. As a result of consolidation and *arhats*, physical trading was being squeezed dry in the *mandi*. Traders were therefore susceptible to being drawn to the *dabba* instead, which was a device that amplified volatility, making physical trade even more risky and less viable. All the while, it led to greater losses, since even the largest *mandi* traders were out of their depth on the *dabba*. Unlike the physical market, where you were constrained by your immediate cash availability in order to make purchases in the auction and payments to farmers, here the possibilities for leveraging yourself into dangerous territory were very high. The *dabba*, *mandi* traders collectively believed, ran on an alliance between big financiers, corporations, and politicians, leaving no scope for small fry to engage productively.

In the *mandi*, the *dabba* is today at the heart of animated and anxious debates about dominance and self-control, and about the correct order of things, especially in terms of the fundamental relationship between the physical and the virtual in governing market life. These anxieties found expression in the metaphors that *mandi* traders used to describe their concerns. 'These days', a young trader observed, as we sat at his shop in the *mandi* after the auction had ended, surrounded by heaps of soybean, 'it feels as if the shadow [*chhaya*] is casting the man.' Some time later, during another afternoon sitting around the *dabba*, watching the computer, the broker imaginatively rearranged the pixels on the screen by picturing a relationship worthy of a daytime soap opera. While juggling two mobile phones and a landline, the broker felt that the *dabba* had yoked the *mandi* to itself. 'It's as if the *mandi* has become the wife of the *dabba*. Now wherever the *dabba* goes, the *mandi* must bow her head and meekly follow.' Egged on by the raucous appreciation that he received from his reclining afternoon companions, he continued, 'It was much better earlier, when she was a free woman. *Mazza aata tha*. It was fun then. Now, I think it is time for a divorce!' Of course, the trader knew all too well that the *mandi* had never been a 'free woman'; it was just that at an earlier time, traders had been freer to have their way with her.

Conclusions

In the context of contemporary discussions on entrepreneurship and enterprise cultures in globalized India, tracing changes in the composition and character of *mandi* trade in a market town like Harda over the last two decades, and engaging with the commentaries of local traders, provides us with important and distinctive insights.

First, they direct our attention to the highly specific, contingent, and complex factors that interact to shape transitions and transactional forms, opportunities, and closures, in different regions, sectors, and sub-sectors of the economy over time. Cultures of enterprise cannot be analysed without understanding these changes in political economy and their diverse effects.

Second, even as 'new' entrepreneurs are emerging in different fields, accompanied by a greater emphasis on individual initiative and self-development both in the cultivation of economic lives and other social and political spheres of engagement, it is striking to note the more 'traditional' and well-established business community of grain traders express a deep loss of their sense of identity and expertise as entrepreneurs, applying their own minds, taking their own positions, and working for themselves. There is little doubt that the evening out of the asymmetries and opportunities for arbitrage on which they had thrived and the end of some of their more lucrative malpractices mark significant improvements in the market for many, especially for farmers. And yet it is interesting to observe that for *mandi* traders the shift from the culture of *vyapaar*, or trading, to the 'service-minded' role under the dominant system of *arhats*, or corporate commissions, is seen as a foreclosing and clamping down on the styles of expertise and enterprise that they had enjoyed exercising. In the process, important

characteristics of creative negotiation, adjustment, and discretion have been lost, while new electronic platforms are seen to have wrought greater volatility and vulnerability for *mandi* traders to contend with.

Finally, while India's ascendant entrepreneurial spirit is often associated with the ascendance of growing and aspirational middle classes, the *mandi* is a site today where the medium size firm is considered the most problematic range in which to find oneself. *Mandi* brokers and mid-sized traders appear to be stuck, unable to break into the next level of the commodity circuit, while all around them in Harda town and its surrounding villages all manner of brokerage is thriving, in which they are unsuited to engage because of their social and economic backgrounds and which, as Marwari *banias*, they consider as crude, distasteful, and even violent. Unsurprisingly, therefore, almost all of them are educating their children to aim to enter private service and looking to shift lines. Meanwhile, some of them are also grudgingly having to recalibrate their 'wholesale mindsets' to engage in low-volume retailing and marketing activities, something that the *kirana* (grocery) *banias* in the bazaar are far more comfortable with. Here, moreover, they must contend with a fast-changing bazaar, where farming families are found to be setting up first-generation 'side businesses', built on the backs of agricultural surplus. Traders are therefore having to go even further in their analysis and their efforts to 'catch hold of a new line' of business. For some, this also means sighting prospects where rampant commercialization might yield private wealth in sectors closely associated with public welfare (such as health and education) as we saw in the comments of the perceptive young trader at the beginning of the chapter.

Notes

1 Harda is classified as a 'Class II town' (populations ranging between 50,000 and 99,000) and is one of nearly 4,000 towns in India with populations between 5,000 and 100,000, known as Class II–IV towns, comprising more than 85 per cent of all urban settlements across the country. (In addition, there are 393 Class I towns in India, with populations over 100,000, including 35 cities with million-plus populations.) Ministry of Urban Development, Government of India, available online at: http://urbanindia.nic.in/urbanscene/urbanmorpho/urbanmorph.htm, accessed 14 July 2012.

2 This view was also reflected in the views expressed by commodity analysts in business newspapers. For instance, see for example, an analysis that was published on the soybean market during one of my fieldwork seasons: Chandrashekhar, G. (2010) 'Speculation chokes oilseeds extraction, animal feed sector', *The Hindu Business Line*, 8 January.

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